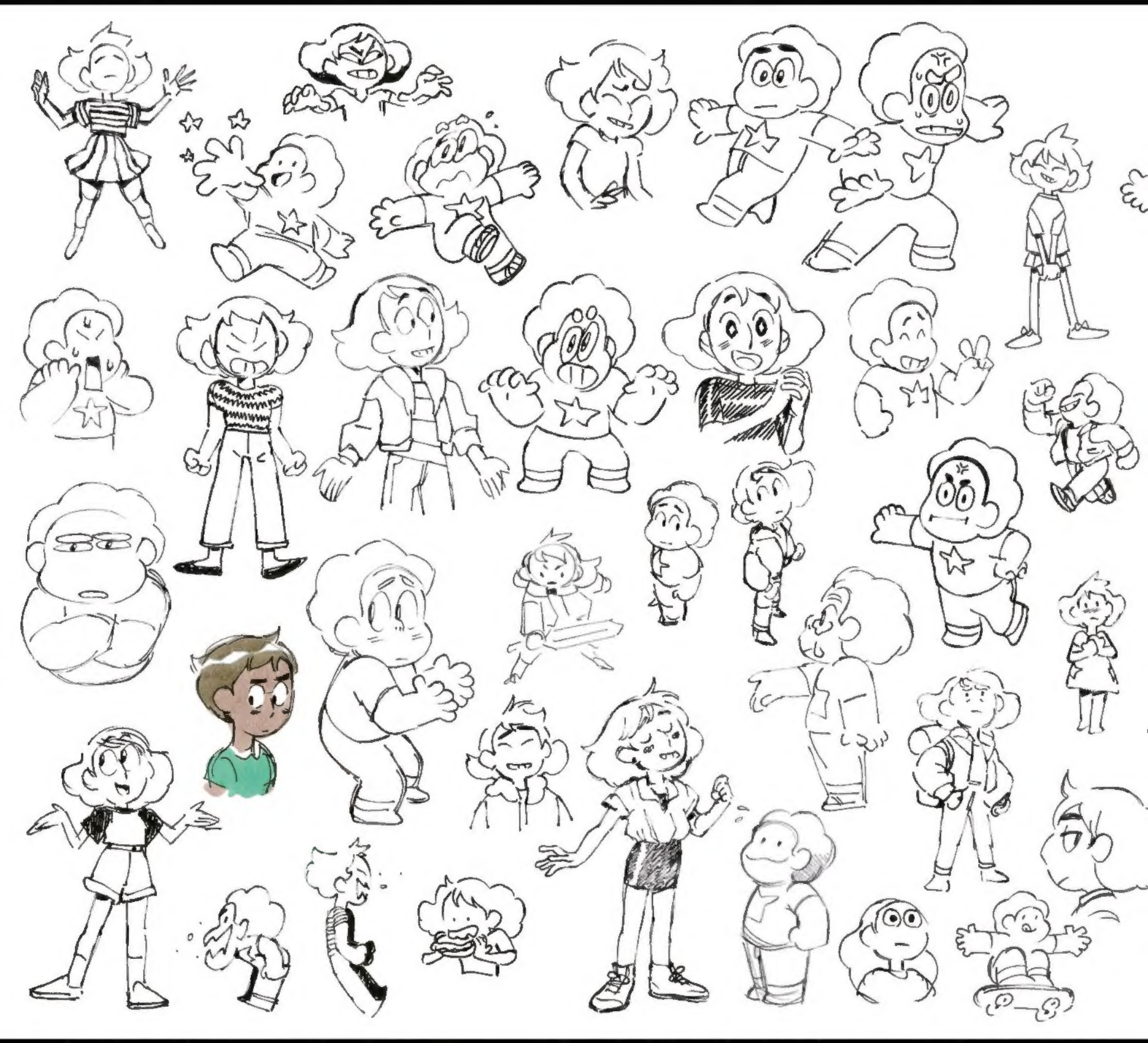
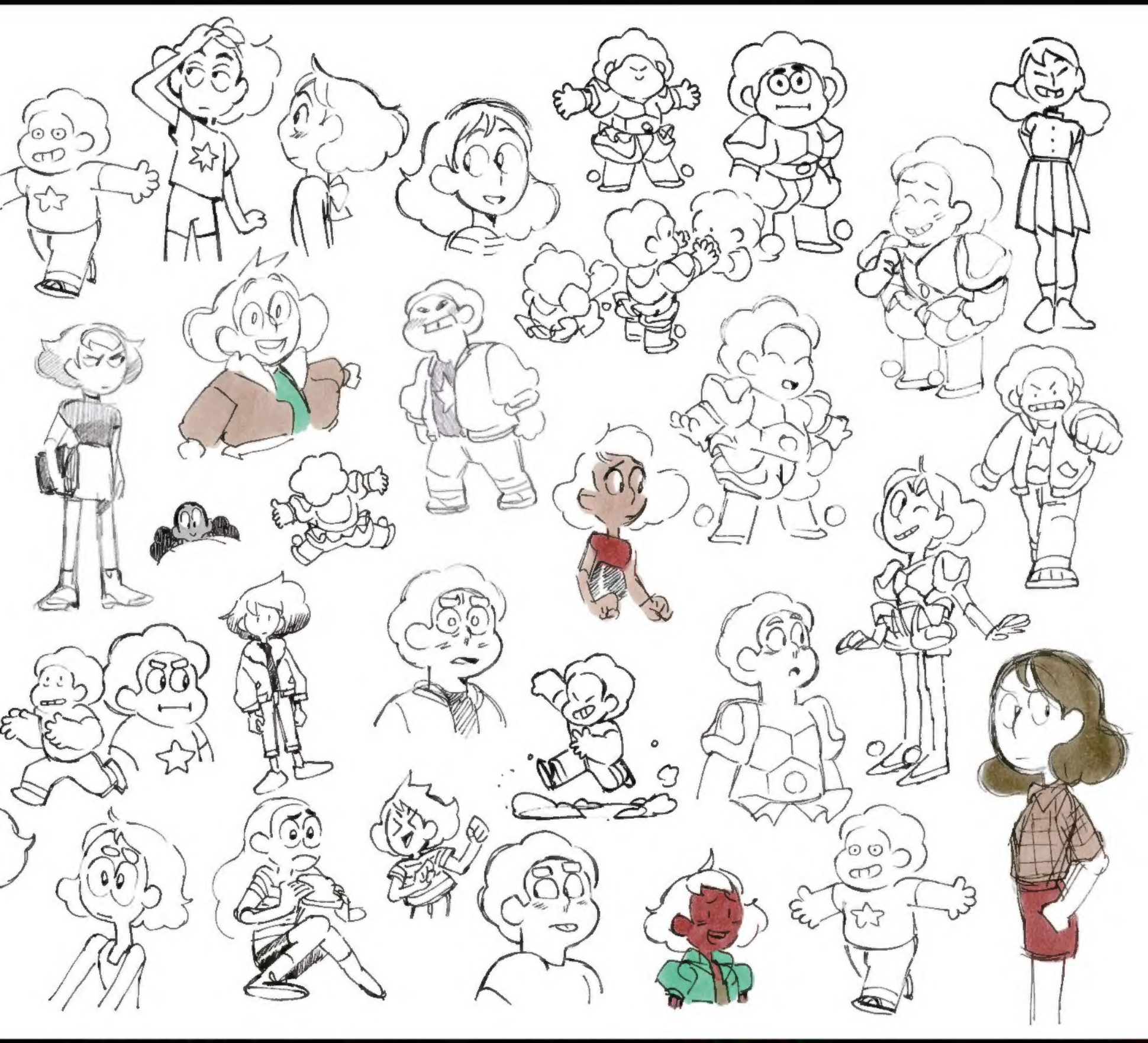
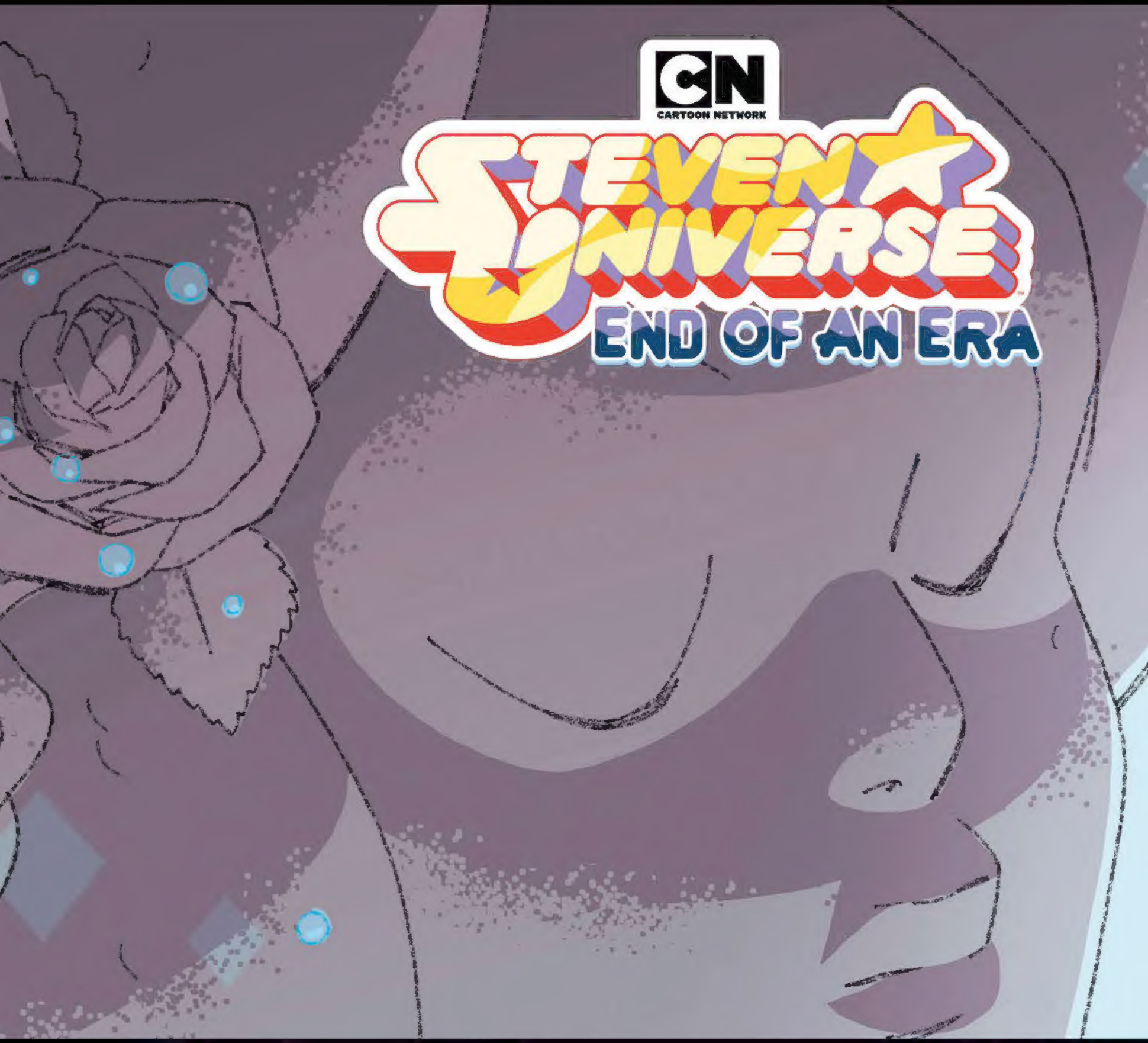
STEVEN UNIVERSE
END OF AN ERA
WRITTEN BY
CHRIS MCDONNELL
FOREWORD BY N. K. JEMISIN





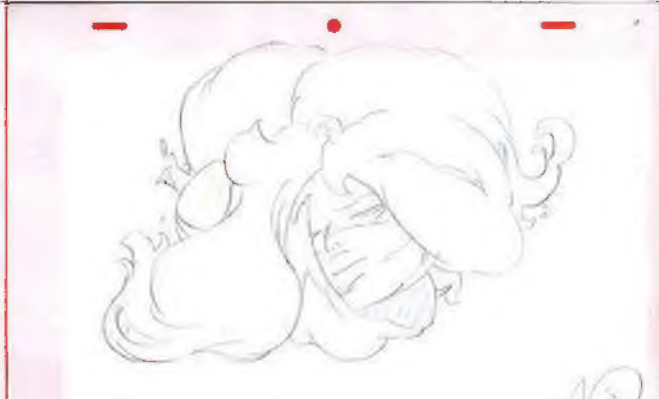

CN
CARTOON NETWORK
STEVEN UNIVERSE
END OF AN ERA

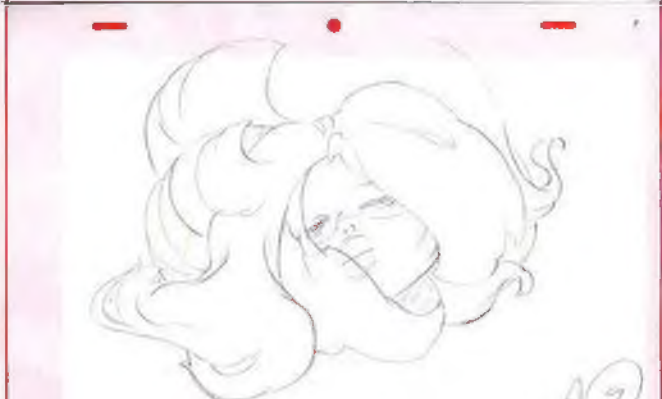
A4

A5

A6

A7

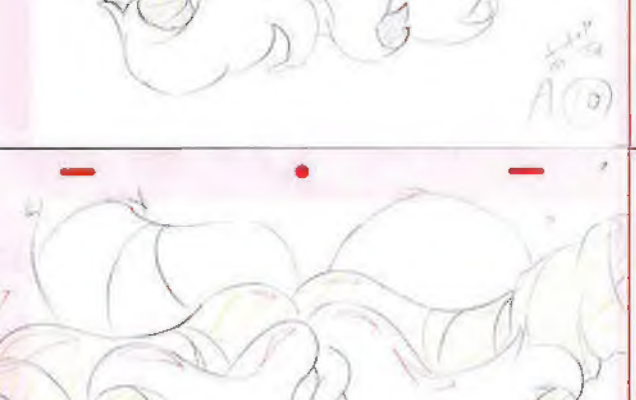

A8

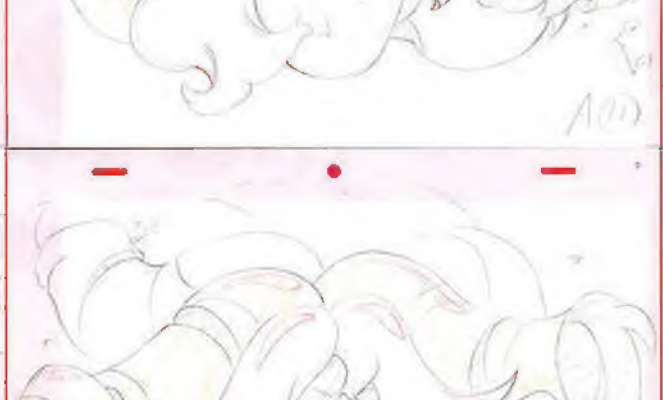

A9

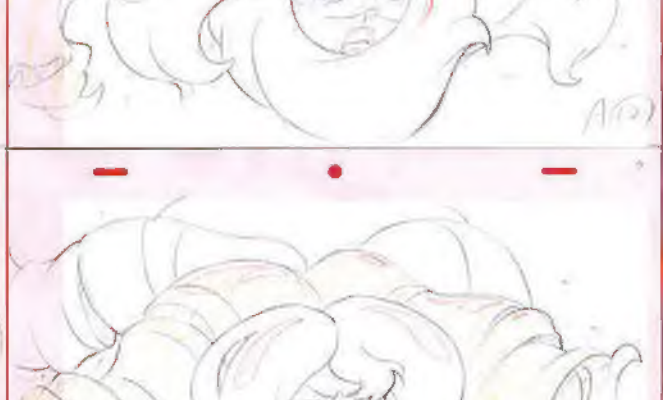
A10

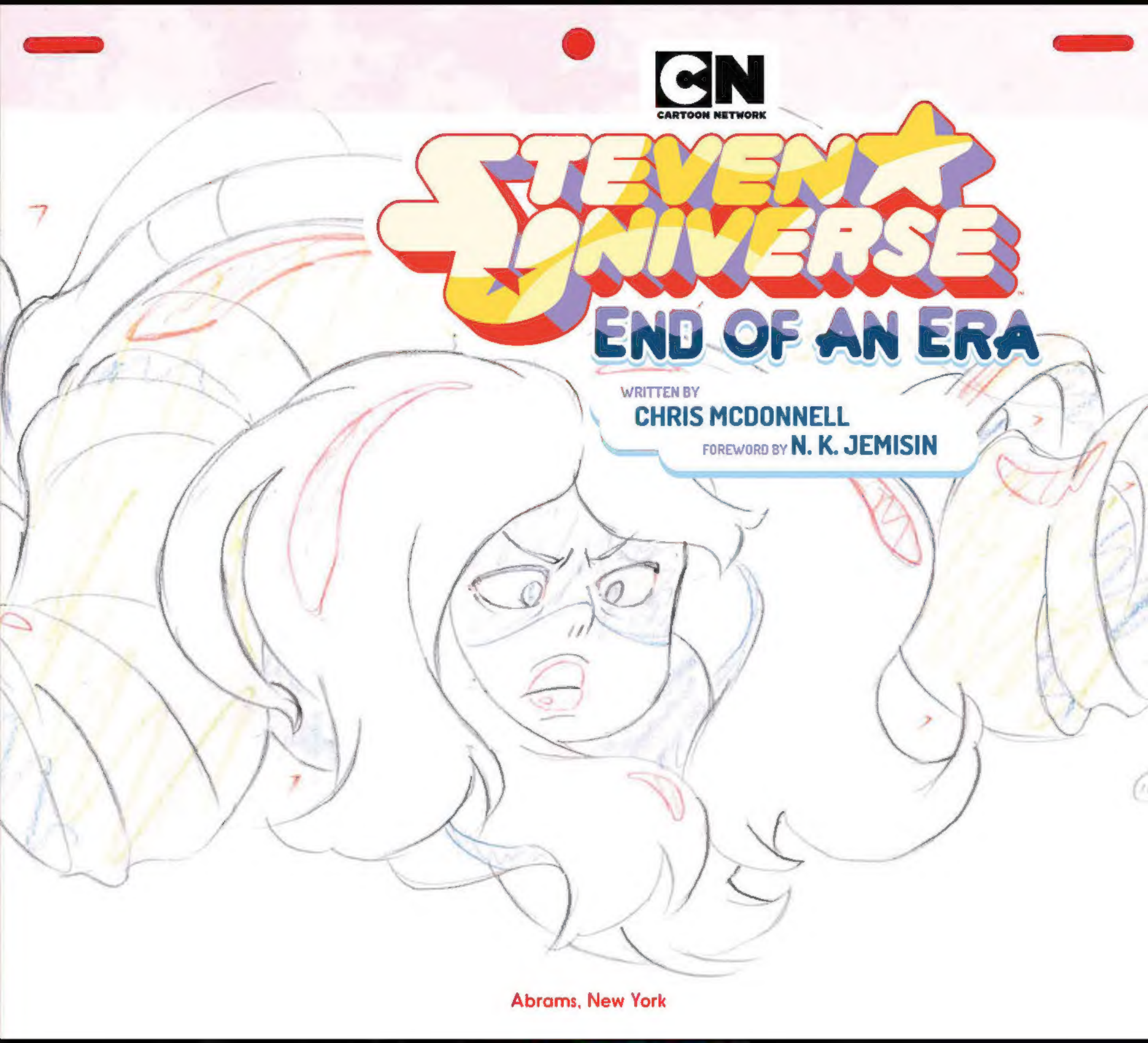
A11

A12


A13


A14


A15



CARTOON NETWORK

STEVEN UNIVERSE

END OF AN ERA

WRITTEN BY
CHRIS MCDONNELL

FOREWORD BY N. K. JEMISIN

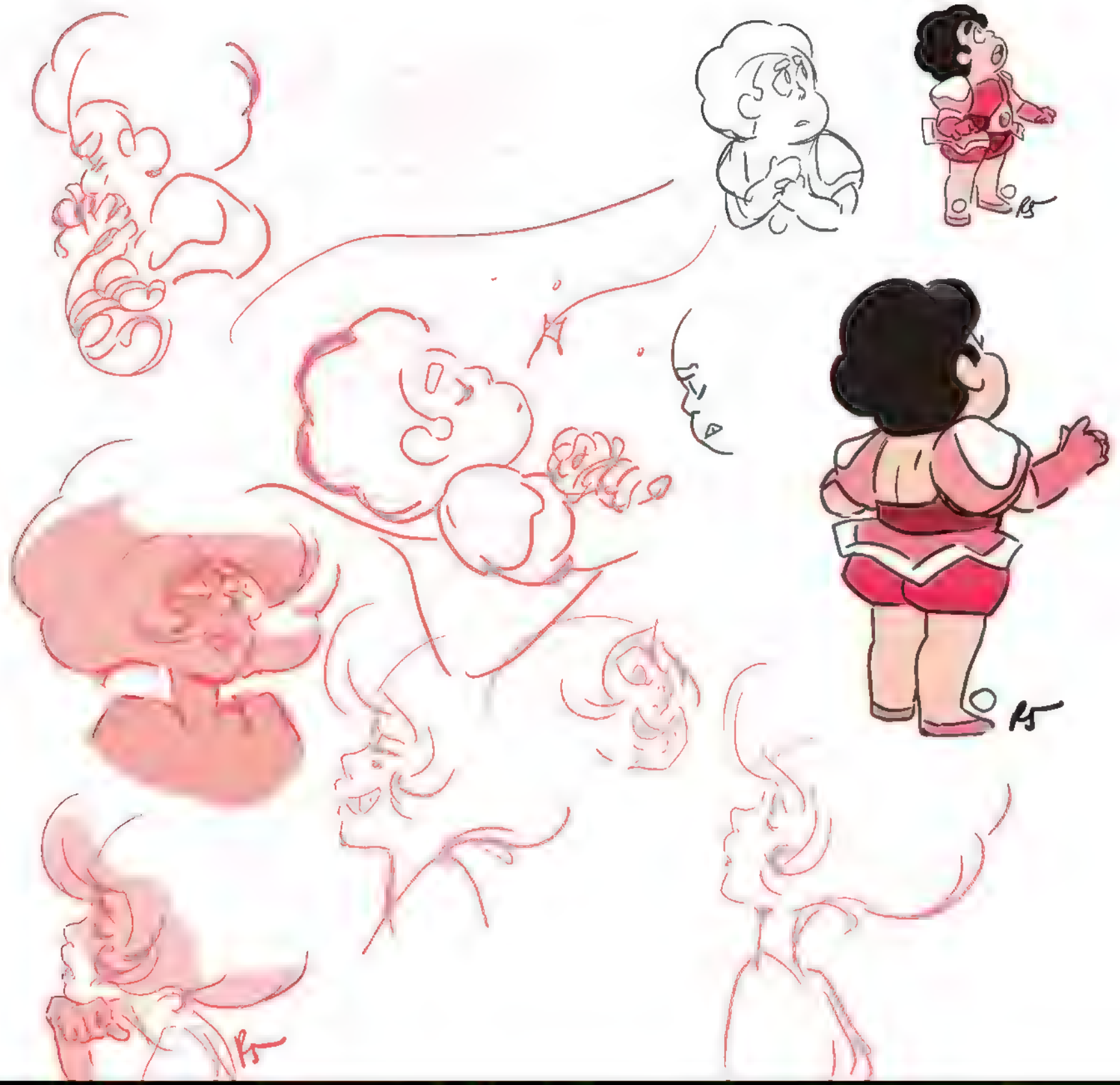
Abrams, New York

For Eddie

CONTENTS

FOREWORD – 9
1: END OF AN ERA – 15
2: THE BEGINNING OF THE END: A SINGLE PALE ROSE – 75
3: THE HEART OF THE CRYSTAL GEMS – 95
4: ERA 3 – 111
5: CHANGE YOUR MIND – 143
6: STEVEN UNIVERSE FUTURE – 189

Previous spread: Animation drawings by Takafumi Hori.
This spread: Background line art by Jane Bak. Color by Jasmin Lai.
Overleaf: Art by Elle Michalka for the episode "Your Mother and Mine" (S5E13).



FOREWORD

By N. K. Jemisin

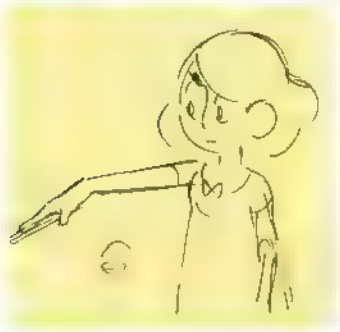
It's just a kids' cartoon, is what I thought the first time friends mentioned to me an amazing show called *Steven Universe*. And though the kids' cartoons of my own childhood have had a major impact on the stories I tell now and how I tell them, I shrugged this one off with perfect adult-ish contempt. I was unimpressed by the synopsis: a little boy protects his hometown with the help of three aliens and his late mother's legacy. American kids' cartoons had changed since I was young, I decided, somewhere along the way they started prioritizing silly cuteness (or absurd ugliness) over any sort of story or moral complexity. And the episodes were too short. How much character depth or cleverness could there be in only eleven minutes?

Then somebody posted the clip of Garnet's identity-proclamation battle-rap love ballad, "Stronger Than You," and I discovered you could get hooked on a show in less than three minutes.

There was just so much going on in that clip. I didn't understand that Garnet was a fusion, but it was easy to see that she faced someone who believed she didn't have the right to exist — a struggle that forms an obvious metaphor for many forms of identity. It was clear that she loved herself enough to fight for that right, and that this self-love was a beautiful, powerful, hard-won thing. I couldn't pin down the voice, though the accent pinged "black Londoner" to my ear, and of course Garnet's black woman coding was obvious: the hair, the hips, the attitude. A cartoon about (among other things) oppressed people taking the radical, daring step of not just accepting themselves, but also demanding respect from others? And the song slaps like whoa.

I was hooked, though I didn't realize it for a while. I watched all the other *Steven Universe* music clips I could find, many of them several times. I found myself singing the songs and thinking about the lyrics. I looked into the music and discovered that "Stronger Than You" was sung by the wondrous Estelle. How the heck did they get Estelle on this? Another fave clip featured Nicki Minaj—whaaaat? But the songs, and their so-intriguing lyrics, were all written by someone named Rebecca Sugar. No idea who this person was, but considering how deeply these songs interrogated identity, relationships, wildly existential stuff like who counts as a person, and how personal power can and should be used? Sugar knew people. The first thing I've ever needed to know, when deciding how much to engage with a new story, is whether I can trust the storyteller to know what they're doing—and very obviously, here I could. These songs boiled down some of the knottiest questions of formative adulthood, *personhood*, and relationships into unbelievably catchy, hard hitting lines. Seriously, this was stuff I struggled

This spread: Era 3 Steven in Pink Diamond's outfit Sketches by Rebecca Sugar.



Above. Drawings by Kat Morris.
Opposite: Pink Diamond's Human Zoo, encircled by Blue and Yellow Diamond's ships. Line art by Steven Sugar. Background paint for "That Will Be All" (S4E15) by Amanda Winterstein, Michelle Kwon, and Jasmin Lai.

to convey over hundreds of pages within my fantasy novels. *Steven Universe* episodes, when I finally gave in and started binge-watching the whole series, did it in . . . just eleven minutes.

See, what a lot of people don't get about fantasy is that one of its purposes is to mirror the self. Technically, all fiction does this! But fantasy in particular highlights the myths that undergird our culture and personal histories, as well as those that outline the agency we're permitted. Basically, fantasy teaches us who can be a hero and how heroism actually works. It's a thing that a lot of fantasy handles poorly, because ours is a genre that's often too concerned with tradition: the same kinds of heroes, undertaking the same kinds of journeys, all for the same rewards.

But here we have *Steven Universe*, in which our heroes are ordinary people—mostly children—who just want to help those they care about. Their families might turn out to consist of an entire race of immortal sentient rocks with hard-light bodies . . . or a nuclear family of overachievers who want the best for their brilliant daughter, or an immigrant family working hard to run a restaurant, or a basically homeless failed musician who is nevertheless the best single dad he can be. Their loved ones might be biological family, or a found family of old friends, or otherworldly entities that aren't even clearly people at first. The journeys that these heroes undertake, in their quest to simply *help*, might be small personal efforts to master a skill or communicate more clearly, or might be epic quests to make cosmically powerful beings see the error of their selfish ways.

And the rewards? Love. Acceptance. Safety. The world gets a little better, or maybe a lot better, all because people who care about others actually choose to *act* on that caring, in a real and beneficial way. Steven's journey tells us that what really makes him powerful isn't his magic mastery, or his mom's sword, or fancy Gem technology, but his willingness to literally position himself as a shield between other people and harm.

Can you understand how revolutionary a message this is, in these grim days of nigh-endless headlines about societal cruelty? Our culture swims in tales of heroism as external, physical power bestowed upon "the right people," who happen to be in the right place and time to use it—but Rose Quartz tried that kind of heroism and failed. Her armies fell, and the planet that she tried to defend was forever changed as a result. Her rebellion, predicated upon the expectation that she was a "natural" leader and would simply know what to do, ended up hurting a stunning number of people. Her life is a repudiation of the myths we've been told about how power works, and an affirmation of how it usually works in reality. *Steven* shows us that the heroes the world really needs are *us*—all of us, however flawed, however small or apparently powerless we might seem. The heroism that will save the world is more of us growing a sense of empathy, and the courage to act in its service.

This is what makes *Steven Universe* the best fantasy show on television, and very much the heroic epic of our times. I might have gotten on board late, but I'm buckled in for the ride now. There's plenty of room for all of you, too.

N. K. Jemisin is the first author in the genre's history to win three consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Novel, all for her Broken Earth trilogy. Her work has also won the Nebula, Locus, and Goodreads Choice Awards. Her speculative works range from fantasy to science fiction to the undefinable; her themes include resistance to oppression, the inseverability of the liminal, and the coolness of Stuff Blowing Up. She has been a reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* and an instructor for the Clarion and Clarion West writing workshops. In her spare time she is a gamer and gardener, and she is a solo single-handedly responsible for saving the world from King Ozzymandias, her dangerously intelligent ginger cat, and his phenomenally destructive sidekick, Maggie. Her essays and fiction excerpts are available at nkjemisin.com.

Art and background paint for "I Am My Mom" (S4E24)
Line art by Emily Walus. Background paint for "I Am My Mom" by Amanda Winterstein, Michelle Kwon, and Ricky Cometa

1: END OF AN ERA

Consider freedom. Freedom is existing and expressing yourself without fear. Some have the luxury to take this for granted, but for many of us, this is not the case. For many, having the courage to freely express our truths can lead to painful consequences.

Think about repression. Repression is being shut down. It is being told *not* to be who you know you are—even by people you love, trust, or idolize. It is being told to hide yourself by authority figures who have power and influence. It is a popular culture that makes people who look or act or think like you into the butt of jokes, or that excludes you entirely, as if you don't exist.

Consider your childhood. This was the formative time when you were learning about and exploring your inner and outer worlds. You were developing your sense of self. Did repressive messages begin to eat away at your self-confidence? Did doubt or shame become lodged in your mind? With no chance for an honest exploration of yourself, repression could have begun to create long-term consequences.

Steven Universe is about freedom—and the fantasy of achieving it for a young hero who must battle repression on a galactic scale.

Rebecca Sugar, creator of *Steven Universe*, has been publicly vocal from the early days of the series' broadcast that one of the shared, central goals of the show's writers, storyboard artists, and crew is to draw authentically from childhood. The diverse crew took this task to heart, and with Rebecca's guidance and their own personal contributions, they crafted a story about characters who experience real, intense emotions—often sprinkled in with lighthearted comedy and dramatic action. As Rebecca wrote in her foreword to the first official art book for the series, *Steven Universe: Art & Origins* (Abrams, 2017), the show was intended to "celebrate all the specific details of all of our childhoods, all the little mannerisms we know in our friends, families, and selves that we hadn't seen reflected on TV before, and all the different media we'd grown up loving for different reasons."

This was a creative storytelling goal because Rebecca and the crew understood that seeding their work with specific, personal details elevated their ability to connect with the audience deeply.

Ian Jones-Quartey [former co–executive producer]: In trying to make the show the best we could, we just wanted more of everything. One of the things that we wanted more of was to make it feel personal and real, so we needed more of ourselves inside the project. It was for all of us. We tried to

(Continued on page 20)

Promotional Art

Inspired by the *Steven Universe* illustrations, friendly and dynamic poses. Promotional illustrations roughed by Jacqueline Hong, inked by Danny Hynes, and colored by Charles Hatley.

CN
CARTOON NETWORK
STEVEN UNIVERSE

Promotional Art

This page: The rough and final versions of a signing card that Rebecca Sugar designed and used for convention appearances. Final inks by Danny Hynes. Color by Efrain Farias. **Opposite:** The *Steven Universe: The Movie* poster artwork. Roughs by Joe Johnston. Background by Steven Sugar. Character inks by Danny Hynes. Color by Charles Hilton.

CN
CARTOON NETWORK
STEVEN UNIVERSE
THE MOVIE

(Continued from page 15)

heap our own experiences into the show—Rebecca and I, our writers Ben Levin and Matt Burnett, every single one of the storyboard team . . . all of us. And maybe those were bad boundaries in some ways [*laughs*], but I think doing that really gave us an edge because we wanted the characters to feel real, and that feeling was really intense. There's always a lot of yearning in *Steven Universe*; there's a lot of great need to be who you are, to be respected, or to look up to people, to know what your identity is. I think we put a lot of our current struggles into the show to make that happen. That's why the show resonated with people so much.

One of the most central, personal aspects of *Steven Universe* is that its title character is based on Rebecca's own younger brother, Steven Sugar, who also served on the crew as a background artist through the end of season five.

Rebecca Sugar [series creator]: I started with Steven because I knew I'd never get sick of writing about my brother—because I love my brother! And then I built everything out from that center. The show is a pastiche of the things that we played and watched and drew when we were tweens, growing up together. Steven and the Crystal Gems personify our sibling relationship. It was always going to be a story about me and Steven, the younger brother to someone who adored him but was also really insecure in their own self. Centering the show around Steven let me avoid talking directly about myself, I suppose. I was able to split myself into multiple characters and exist on the sidelines in relation to him. But the deeper we got into the show, the more I had to mine from my own experiences in order to keep writing and keep the story authentic.

Rebecca personified her sibling relationship with Steven in the three main characters of the Crystal Gems—Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl—because she knew that there was much to explore within herself by writing these characters. As has been Rebecca's method since her teenage days creating comics, she intentionally designs each new project to attack something head-on—a technique not yet tried, a subject not yet learned, or something inside not yet examined. The insecurity that Rebecca felt in the early days of the series' creation was something that she knew needed to be studied and confronted.

Rebecca: I like to start a project not knowing with a goal to discover something about myself or to hone a skill. After eight years, I've learned a lot. [*Laughs.*] When I first started the show, I was challenging myself to create female characters, something I had avoided for a long time. I didn't feel qualified to write about the female experience for reasons I couldn't put my finger on back then. But there was a lot I wanted to say, as someone who grew up socialized as a girl and perceived as a woman. I did not know yet how to decouple the negative experiences I'd had trying to break into comics and animation, the grooming from mentors, the dizzyingly low expectations for my work, et cetera, from my own personal dissatisfaction with the labels of "woman" and "girl," so it all swirled into one big, frustrating hurricane that I started avoiding completely. But with *Steven Universe* I decided to look right into the eye of it, specifically because I was so afraid of all of it, which made me sure that there was power and interest there that I needed to understand.

Through years of work on the series, Rebecca began to understand what was uncomfortable about turning her gaze inward and confronting what she found. A lifetime of absorbing the background radiation of starkly gendered societal messaging had become a repressive influence on her

Rebecca: What I learned from working on *Steven* was that I was able to put myself into female characters if I jumped through hoops to make them not actually women. Writing-wise, the Gems reference ways that women are often marginalized, in the abstract—Gems are objectified, expected to fit perfectly in their designated boxes, and they

Sketchbook and sticky note drawings by Kat Morris

have to recover from years of being conditioned to think that their own experiences somehow matter less. But they don't associate any of those things with womanhood. And a lot of their socialization as Gems is the opposite of the expectations I felt as I was growing up. Gems view ambition and, frankly, *working*, as something that's expected of them. They aren't expected to be loving or kind—they're expected to be powerful. (It's never a surprise when they are powerful.) And when they arrive at love or kindness, it gets to have a specificity and depth of meaning decoupled from an expectation that they should be naturally emotionally intuitive or gentle, which they generally are not. Instead, they arrive at love and gain emotional intelligence in a way specific to each of them. Scrambling the cultural capital for female characters was exciting to me, but over the course of the show, as people who related to these characters began reaching out to me, and as I learned the language to describe how I had always felt, I realized that what I was really loving about writing these characters was being able to recontextualize my experiences through a nonbinary lens.

Rebecca wanted to explore the semiotics of the hyper-gendered cartoons that had made her feel so uncomfortable as a child, and what it would be like to remix them, challenging that feeling of alienation.

Rebecca. This is not the only story that I have to tell, but when you have to make 162 episodes of a television show and you're really pulling from all the wells that you have, it is really clear that there was a particular well that I was pulling from that I couldn't actually articulate out loud. And it's still difficult to talk about, even doing it right now.

But being more open with myself and with other people has made being alive so much easier—it's just unbelievable! [*Laughs*]

Steven Universe doesn't limit the ways viewers of any stripe may be able to find their own personal connections with the series. The show's empathetic warmth, love, acceptance, and depictions of characters and relationships almost never seen on television did, however, make the show a beacon for marginalized audience members.

Joe Johnston [supervising director]: The show dives deep into topics of identity and gender in a way that no other show on television, especially for children, did before it. I think when there are only a couple of things in your life that you identify with, you're gonna grab on hard and not let go. Thankfully, I think we're starting to see this change, as more and more content is being produced that deals in these arenas

Miki Brewster [storyboard artist]: I think *Steven Universe* has reached a lot of people who have felt passed over by other media—they connect with *Steven Universe* on a level that they've been unable to with other shows. I think as a young person, particularly a young queer person, your days are spent flailing, endlessly trying to figure out how you're truly meant to look or act. When someone like that finally sees a character they can relate to, it can feel like having an island to cling to after being adrift at sea. You finally have an image to empathize with and emulate. I think this is one of the reasons fans attach so deeply to *Steven Universe* characters.

I think there is also something to be said for the general feelings that the series imparts. Steven is both human and Gem but has to work until he's adopted fully into either world. The Crystal Gems are a small band of outlaws trying to continue their lives as they hide from a much greater force. These aren't individual characters for people to latch on to, but feelings that people can empathize with and feel validated by.

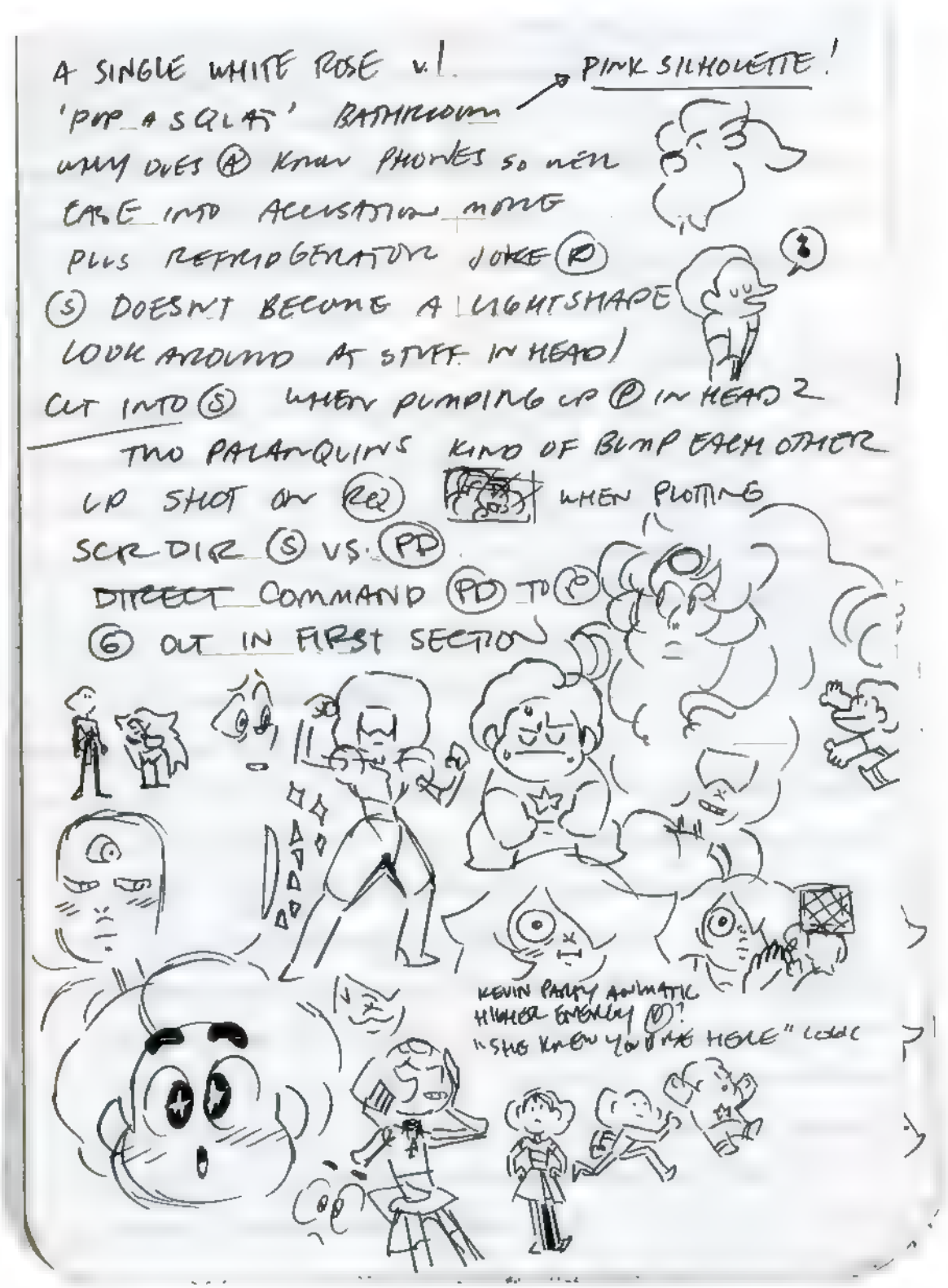
Behind the scenes during early development of the series, Rebecca and the crew occasionally framed their intentions to include the experience of being a marginalized member of society as subversive—specifically, as "subversive in a positive way." This changed, however.

Ian: The show evolved really naturally. When we started, we still felt like, "I can't believe they gave us the keys to the car! We're going to do all the stuff we want to do, and we're finally going to get to make the cartoons that we want to make, and we're going to be really subversive and sneaky and get in all this really cool stuff!" But as we actually started making it, it became more obvious that we wanted to do a good job [*laughs*], and it wasn't so much about "Oh wow, we get to do this!" it was more like, "Oh no, we're doing it, and we want to make sure that we're honest about what we're doing and that we're telling the story that we want to tell."

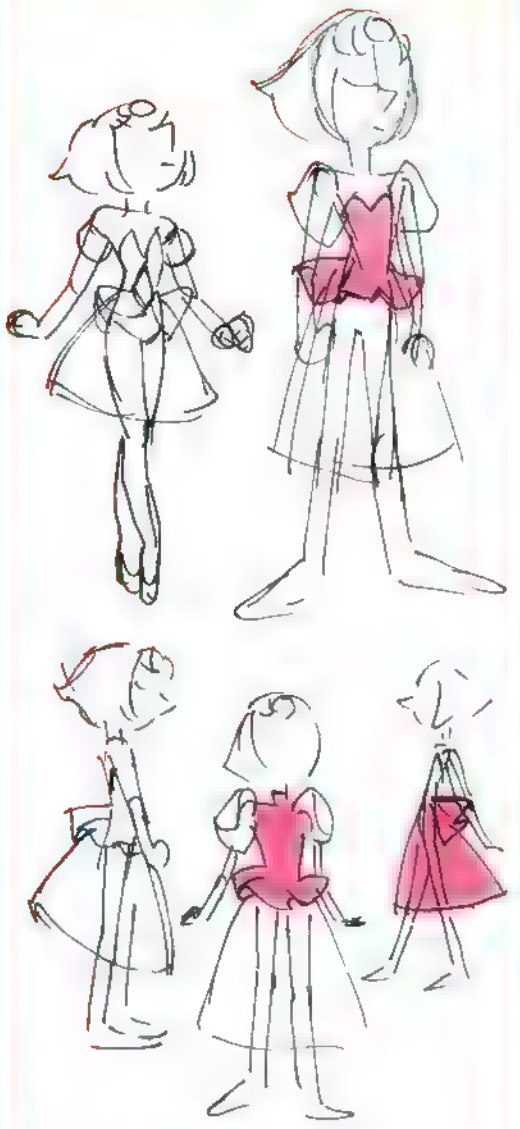
We wanted to make sure that we were putting the fantasy up on screen. Sometimes a fantasy is as small as the desire to be respected as a person. And that's all that it is. So it became more authentic, and the impostor syndrome of "I can't believe we're getting to do this!" became "No, actually, the audience deserves a show about this, because they've been denied this for a really long time."

Steven's fantasy message simply amounts to the idea that marginalized people deserve to exist and pursue happiness. The show is a fantasy in and of itself as well: It's the fantasy of a cartoon for Rebecca, Ian, and all those among us who have also been marginalized.

Rebecca: I want marginalized kids to know that they deserve to express themselves. If they're being shut down for what they like or wear or want or for not fitting into whatever box someone else is putting them in, it's not their fault. When you're young and everyone is telling you to "be yourself," as long as that fits *their* idea of you, it can be terribly confusing. I just hope that our show can be a little voice, a little presence in the living room that says, "People shouldn't be treating you that way." It shouldn't be a fantasy to be able to just talk about how you feel.


A SINGLE WHITE ROSE v.1
PINK SILHOUETTE!
'POP A SQUAT' BATHROOM
WHY DOES (A) KNOW PHONES SO MEN
CAKE INTO ACCUSATION MOVE
PLUS REFRIGERATOR JOKE (P)
(S) DOESN'T BECOME A LIGHTSHAPE
LOOK AROUND AT STUFF IN HEAD!
CUT INTO (S) WHEN PUMPING UP (P) IN HEAD 2
TWO PALANQUINS KIND OF BUMP EACH OTHER
LP SHOT ON (RQ)
WHEN PLOTTING
SCR DIR (S) VS (PD)
DIRECT COMMAND (PD) TO (P)
(G) OUT IN FIRST SECTION
KEVIN PARTY ANIMATIC
HIGHER ENERGY (P)?
"SHE KNEW YOU WERE HOLE"

SINGLE WHITE ROSE v.2
(S) FOLLOWS
YES (S)?
TIMESKIP ON JUNK
SPEAR IS ALSO "S"
"MY CELLPHONE!!!"
SCR DIR (P) IN BATTLEFIELD
SCR DIR (S) WALKING UP TO (P)
MO RUMBO AROUND PEARL'S GEM
(P) "DO WE REALLY HAVE TO DO THIS?" SEEMS LIKE BACK PEDAL.
IS (PD) REVEAL CLEAR ENOUGH?
[(P) NOT EQUAL]
BOTH HANDS OVER (P) MOUTH
→ FOLLOW FLOWER, TRANSFORM
PICK UP SWORD
AND WALK OFF

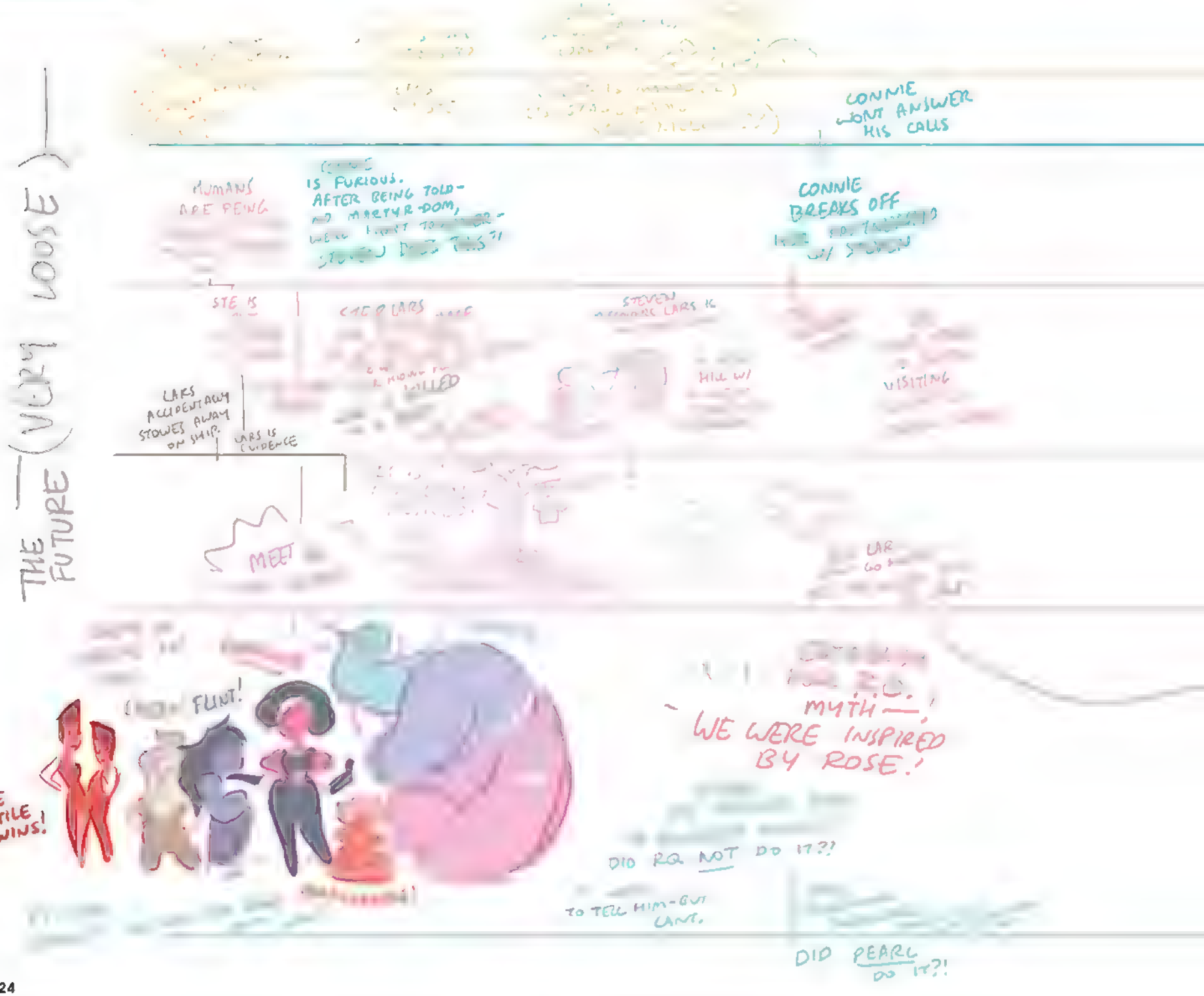


This spread Up[illegible]k to Us and drawings [illegible]kal Mo[illegible]ris to p[illegible] "A Single Pa[illegible]R[illegible]s."

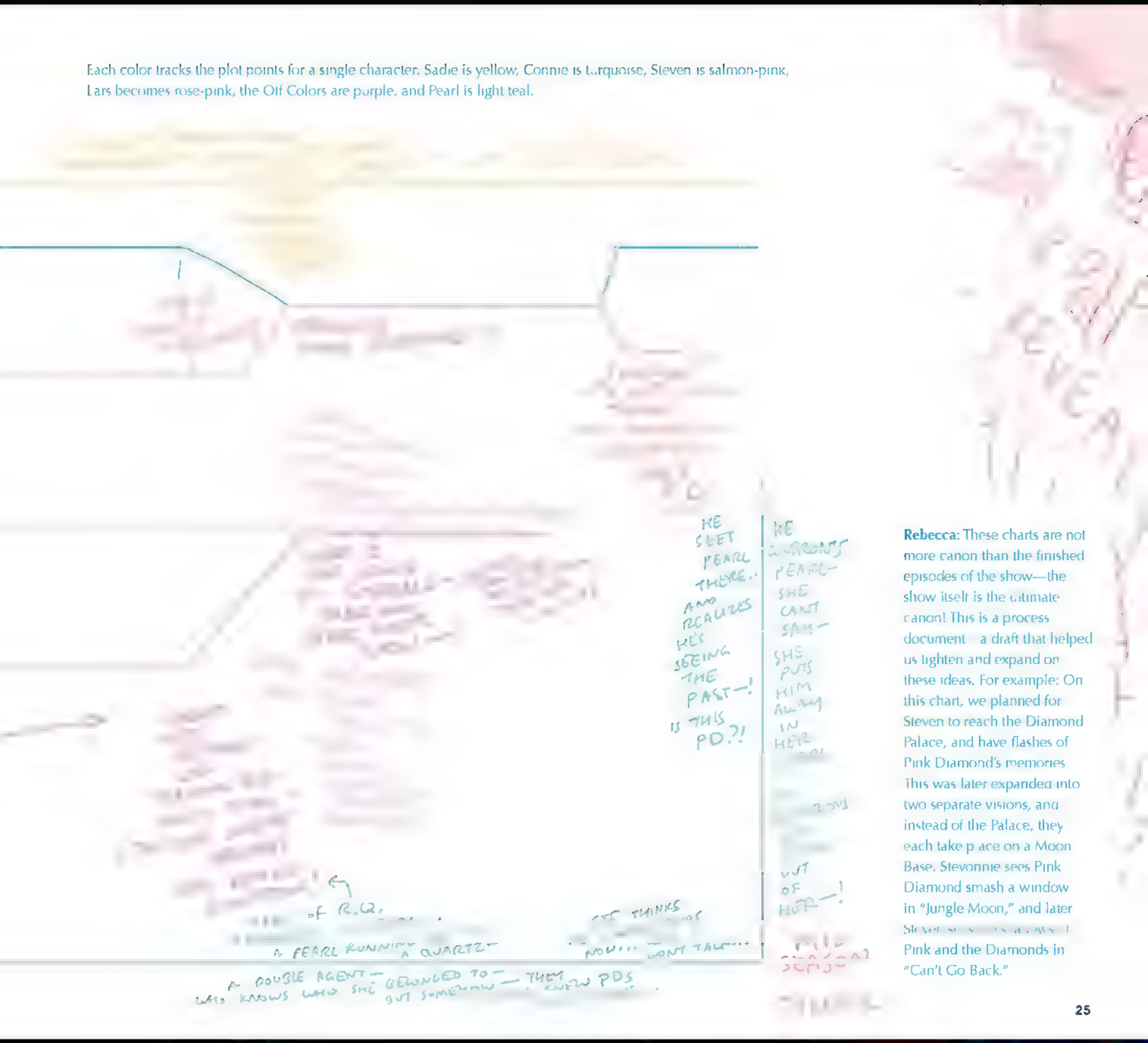
Overleaf and pages 26–27 As [illegible]s[illegible]d [illegible]n the pr[illegible]ss Save [illegible]n[illegible]ese [illegible]ar[illegible]k Art & Orgies [illegible]obus a Segar [illegible]n[illegible]s [illegible]e[illegible]e[illegible]s[illegible]s s[illegible]n[illegible]e [illegible]ars [illegible]p[illegible]d [illegible]e[illegible]e[illegible]s[illegible]s[illegible]s[illegible]y [illegible]d[illegible]n[illegible]ts. E[illegible]h [illegible]r[illegible]w [illegible]n[illegible]e[illegible]r was [illegible]r[illegible]d [illegible]s[illegible]n [illegible]a[illegible]e[illegible]s[illegible]s[illegible]s. [illegible]ost [illegible]mp[illegible]r[illegible]d[illegible] [illegible]s[illegible]e[illegible]s[illegible]s[illegible]n [illegible]e[illegible]n [illegible]ast [illegible]ays [illegible]t [illegible]ork. [illegible]s[illegible]s[illegible]s [illegible]f[illegible]r [illegible]h[illegible]s [illegible]s [illegible]a[illegible]e [illegible]ese [illegible]ar[illegible]s.

Charts

Rebecca Sugar [illegible] is a [illegible] organized document that writers room boards use during storyboarding stage. These were handed out to the crew to let everyone know our latest plans for where the story was heading



Each color tracks the plot points for a single character. Sadie is yellow, Connie is turquoise, Steven is salmon-pink, Lars becomes rose-pink, the Off Colors are purple, and Pearl is light teal.


HE SEES PEARL THERE.. AND REALIZES HE'S SEEING THE PAST—! IS THIS PD?!
HE WARNS PEARL— SHE CAN'T SAVE— SHE PUTS HIM AWAY IN HER
A PEARL RUNNING A QUARTZ—
A DOUBLE AGENT— WHO KNOWS WHO SHE BELONGED TO— BUT SOMEHOW— THEY KNEW PDS

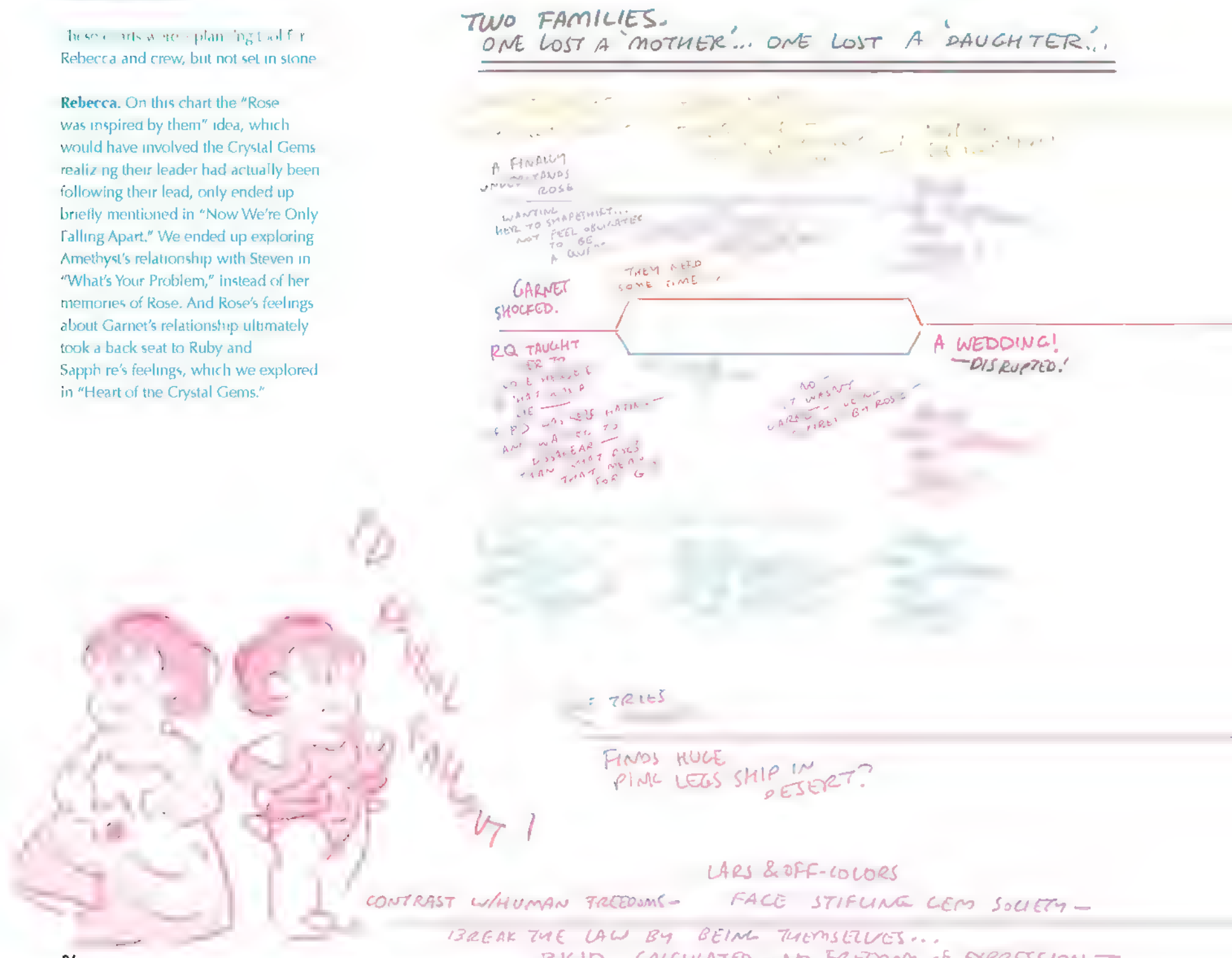
Rebecca: These charts are not more canon than the finished episodes of the show—the show itself is the ultimate canon! This is a process document—a draft that helped us lighten and expand on these ideas. For example: On this chart, we planned for Steven to reach the Diamond Palace, and have flashes of Pink Diamond's memories. This was later expanded into two separate visions, and instead of the Palace, they each take place on a Moon Base. Stevonnie sees Pink Diamond smash a window in "Jungle Moon," and later Steven sees Pink and the Diamonds in "Can't Go Back."

Charts

These charts were planning tools for Rebecca and crew, but not set in stone

Rebecca. On this chart the "Rose was inspired by them" idea, which would have involved the Crystal Gems realizing their leader had actually been following their lead, only ended up briefly mentioned in "Now We're Only Falling Apart." We ended up exploring Amethyst's relationship with Steven in "What's Your Problem," instead of her memories of Rose. And Rose's feelings about Garnet's relationship ultimately took a back seat to Ruby and Sapphire's feelings, which we explored in "Heart of the Crystal Gems."

Rebecca in his gear. Sadie's yellow. Amethyst's lavender. Garnet is magenta. Ruby is red. Sapphire's blue. Pearl is light teal, Steven is salmon-pink, the Off Colors are purple, and the Diamonds are yellow, blue, and gray



BOTH NEED TO HEAL — UNDERSTAND WHO THEY LOST — AND WHY — AND UNDERSTAND STEVEN!

SLEEPING BEAUTY STYLE: THE PRINCESS RETURNS TO THE CASTLE.

STE IS WELCOMED BACK AS P.D.?!

THE DIAMONDS COME FOR THE CLUSTER! A MASSIVE FIGHT—!

POSITIVE

4+B ARE RELIEVED TO HAVE PINK BACK— — BUT — WD IS VINDICATED

I KNEW YOU'D BE BACK!!

(CONNIE INVOLVED — HELPS STE UNDERSTAND 'EXACT PARENTS')

TO UNDERSTAND WHO HE IS NOW.

SHE PULLS OUT HIS GEM, SO PD WILL EMERGE. TO HER HORROR— A PINK STEVEN EMERGES.

FINAL STE ARC— A CRISIS OF IDENTITY—

IS SO HARDENED— SHE'S ONLY DEFEATED

— STEVEN SELF ACTUALIZES. —

HEAL THE MONSTERS!

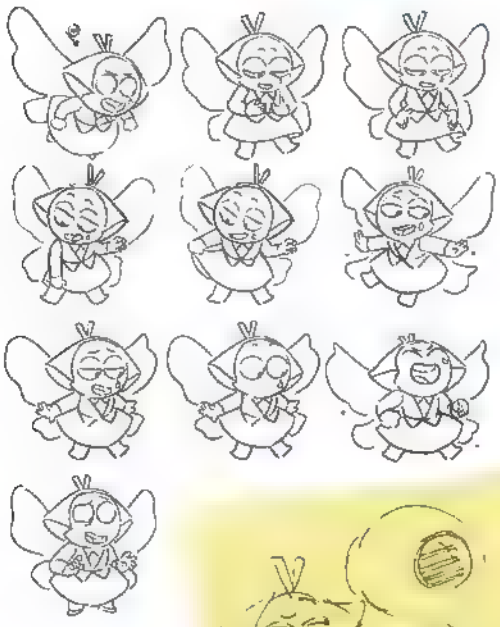
HELP THE OFF-COLORS!

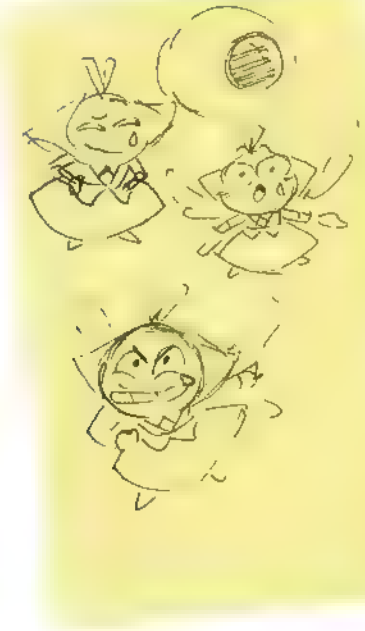
LIVE WITH HUMANS!

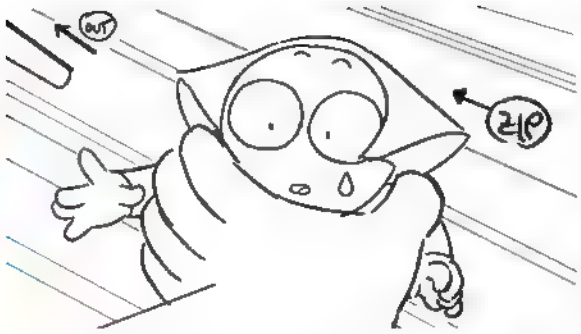
CARE FOR THE GEMS THEY'VE MADE BEFORE THEY MAKE A MILLION MORE!

FIND OUT WHAT'S ACTUALLY GOING ON W/ THEIR CHILDREN!

"Wanted"

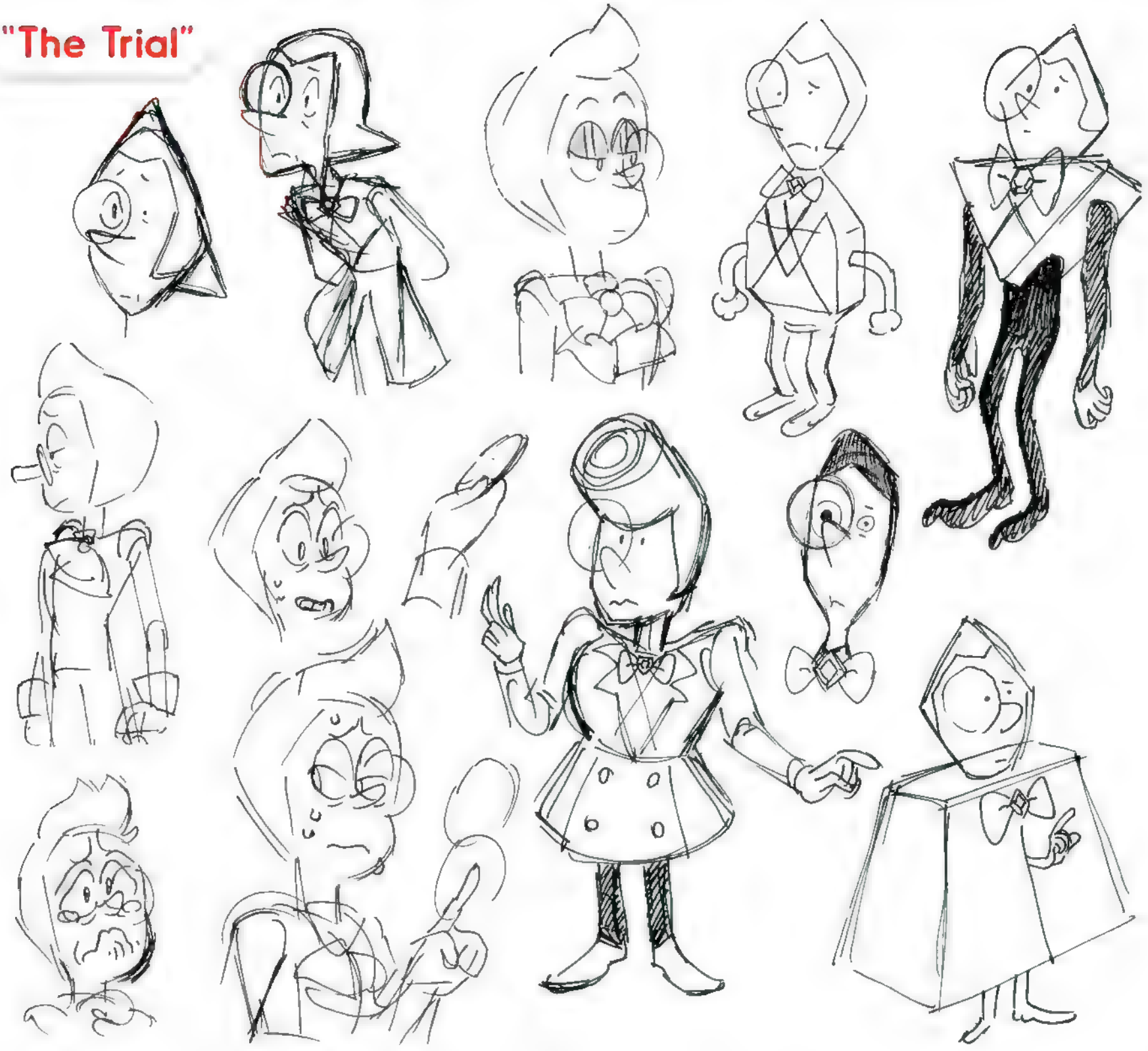


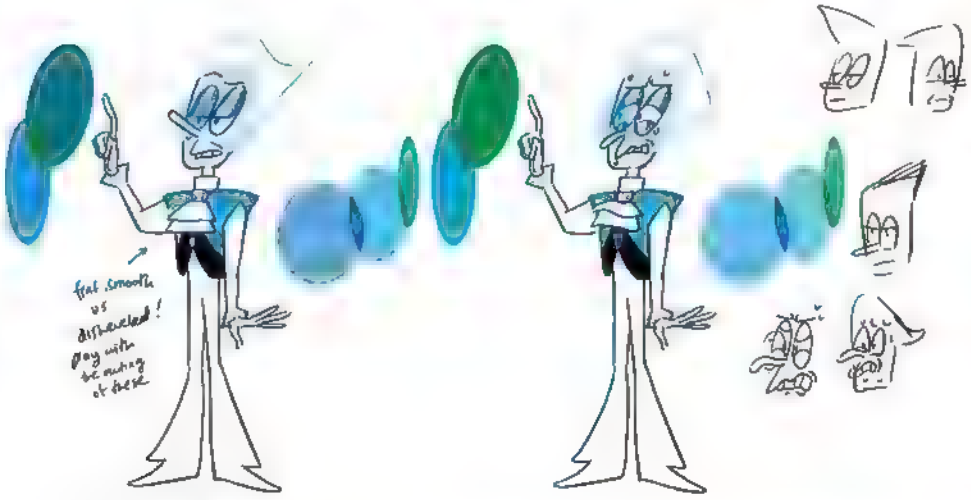


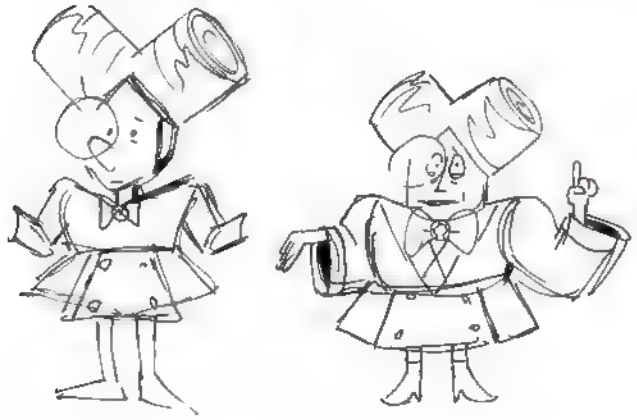


"I Am My Mom" (S4E24). **Opposite**: Stills from the Crystal Gems' standoff with Aquamarine. **Above**: Boards and model art of Aquamarine and Topaz. Boards and sketches by Kat Morris. Color concept art by Rebecca Sugar.

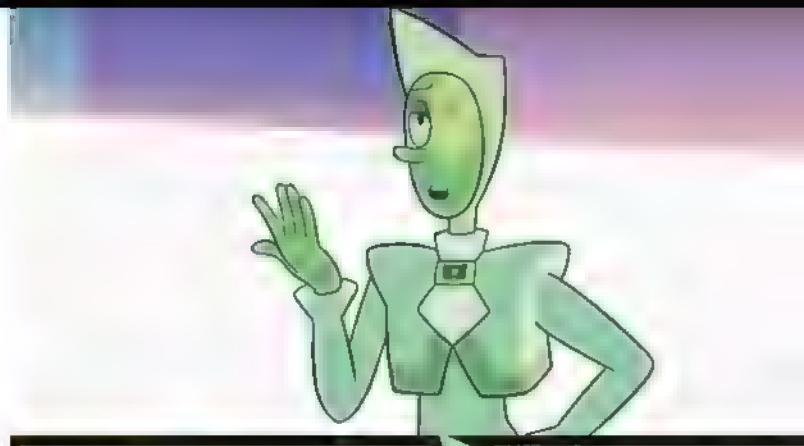
"The Trial"

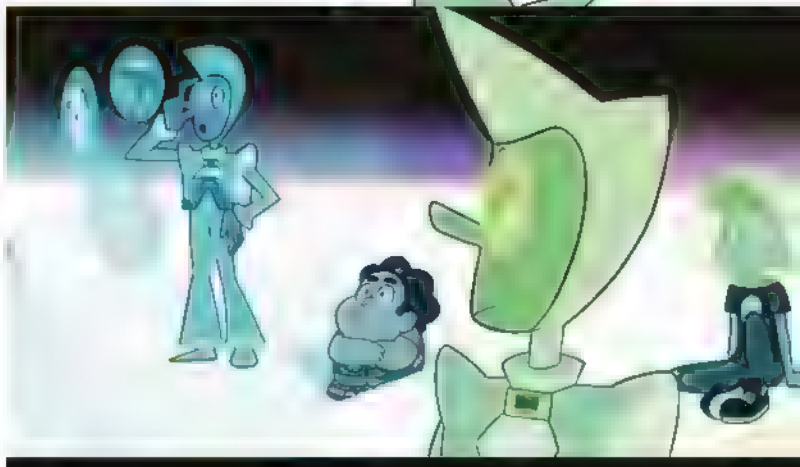


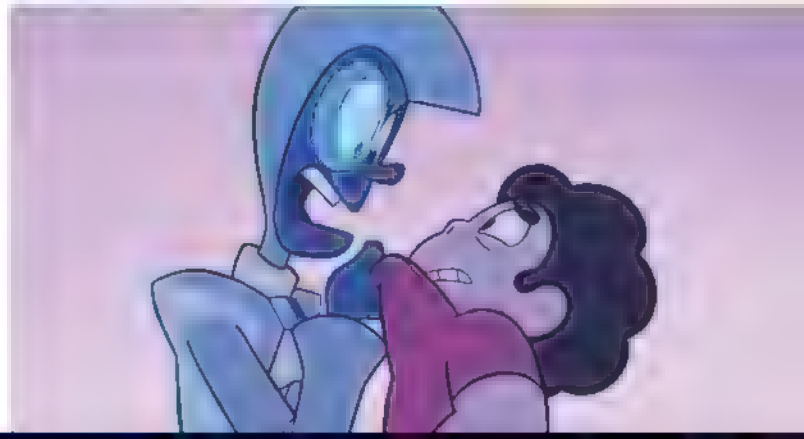




Concept sketches for Zircon's costume and design of the Gem Temple. Art by Rebecca Sugar, Kat Morris, Colin Howard, and Kat Morris







"Wanted"

IMPERIAL TOPAZ

LIKE A "LURCH" OR A FRANKENSTEIN

HUGE, LOOMING WALL OF A GEM...

SLOW, LUMBERING...

SUPER HEAVY ESP WHEN FULL OF PEOPLE.

BIG, SILENT, LEERING —

SUPER HIGH CLASS BRAT PAIRED W/ HOMEWORLDS' GRIZZLIEST GOON

YOU GIT 'EM!

ABOUT 12 FT.

TOPAZ IS A FUSION PRISON.

CAPTURING TECHNIQUE:

① TOPAZ DE-FUSES INTO 2 IDENTICAL TOPAZ-ES.

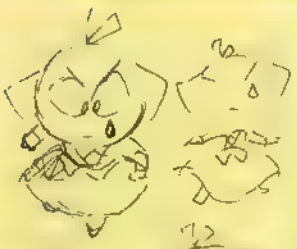
HUMANS NO LONGER CLIP THROUGH — THEY'RE GRABBING THEM.

② TOPAZ-ES GROUP HUG AROUND THE HUMANS

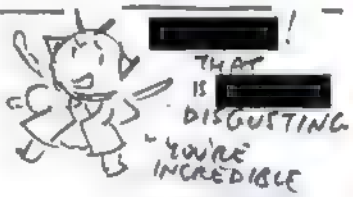
WHEN THEIR BODIES TOUCH...

③ TOPAZES FUSE AROUND THE HUMANS

④ SOLIDIFIED AS A FUSION W/ HUMANS STUCK INSIDE.



DIRTY, RUTHLESS HARDCORE ALIEN WAR TACTIC AS FAR AS GEMS ARE CONCERNED.

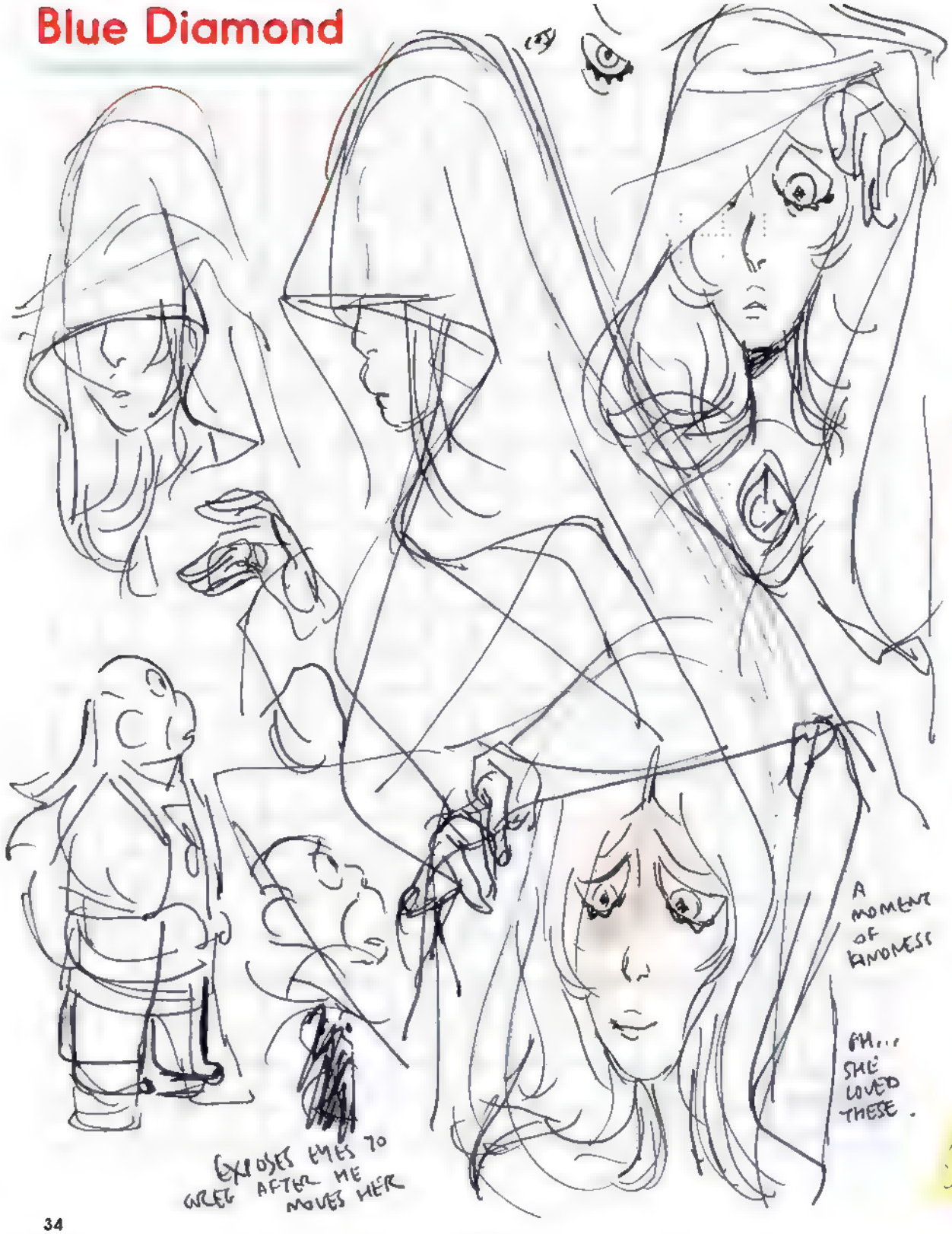


Above Concept art by Kat Morris

Right. Sticky note sketches by Kat Morris

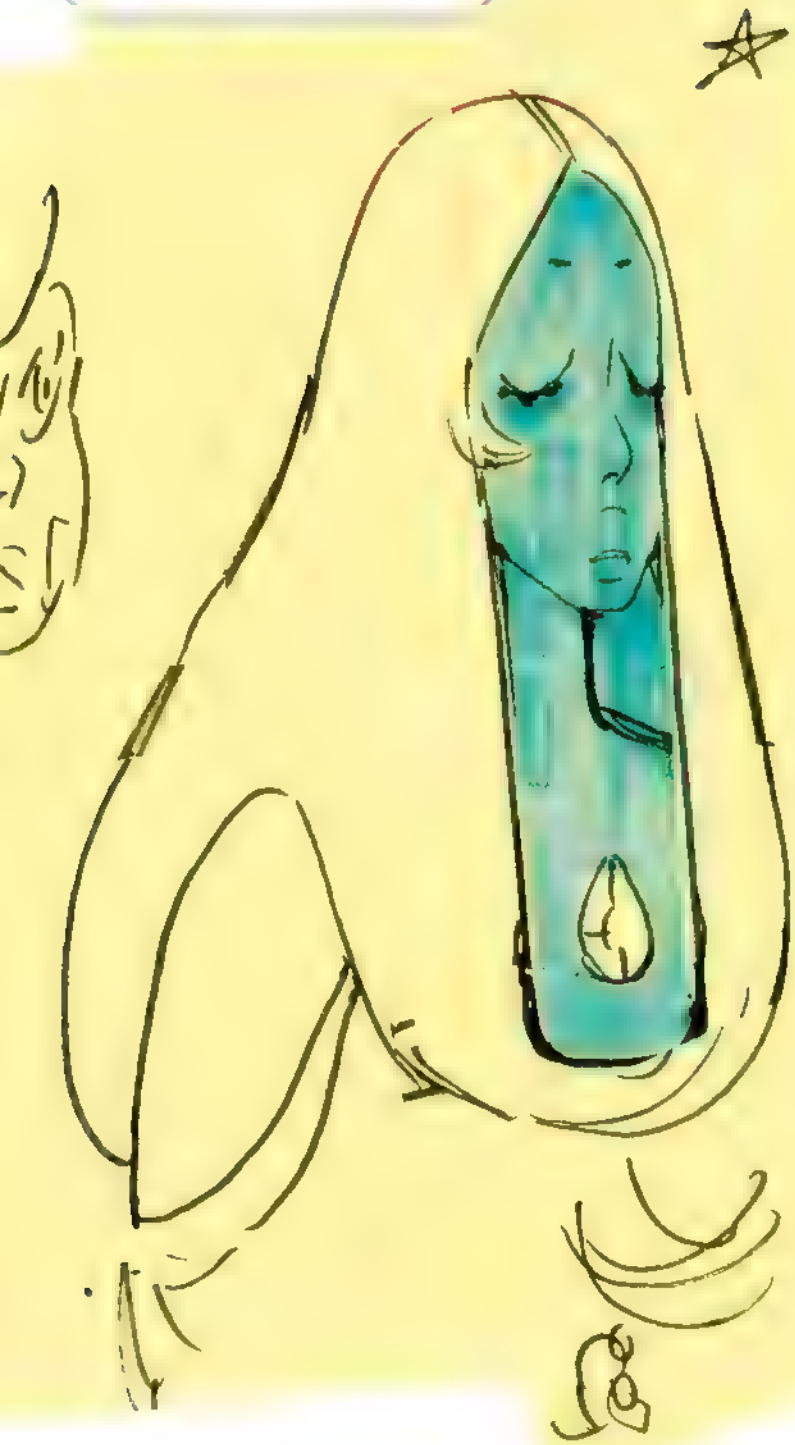
Above [illegible] designs by Ardy Romanelos and [illegible] Howard Cruse; styling by [illegible] Dias
Right Concept art by Rebecca Sugar

Blue Diamond

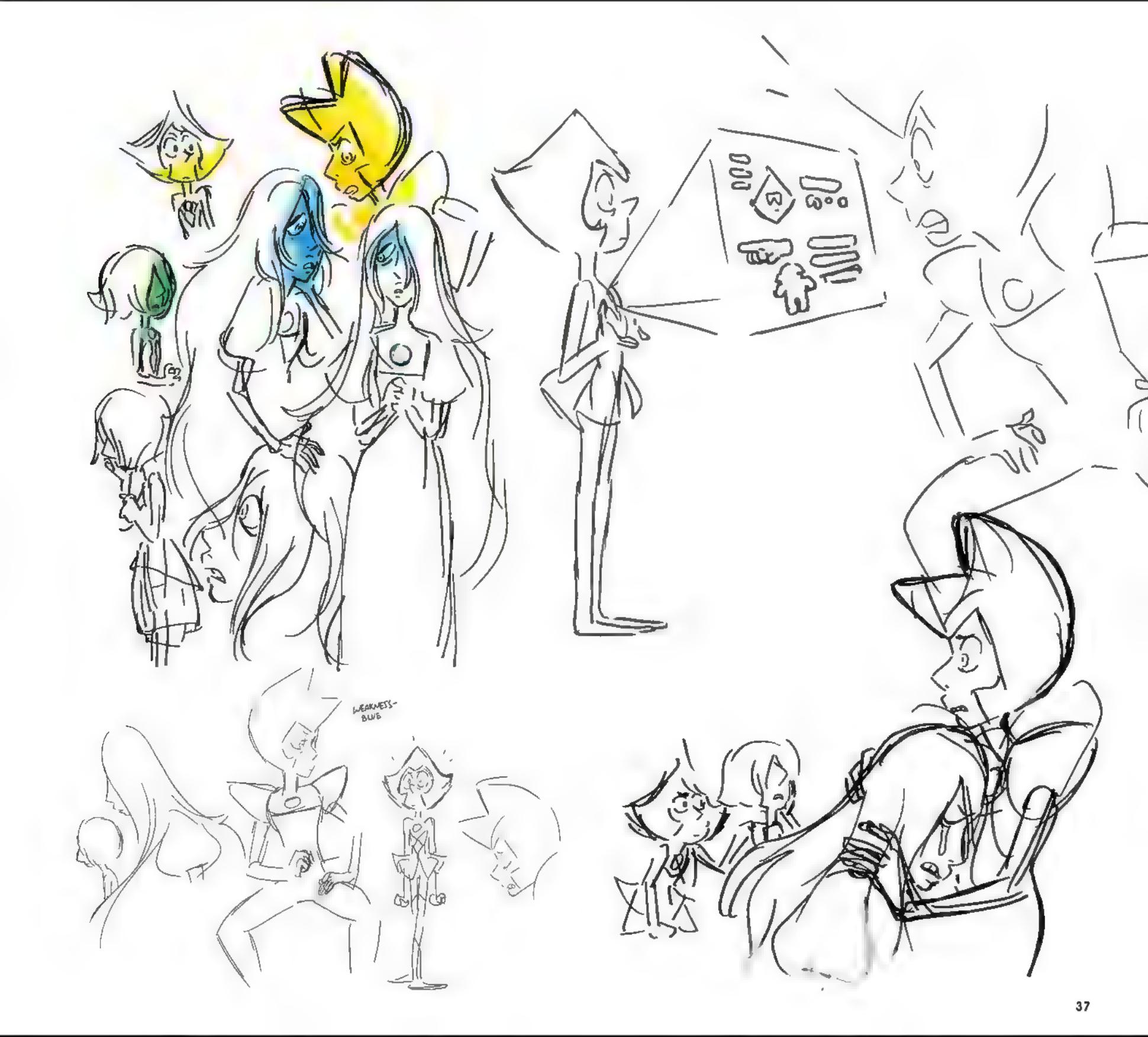


Blue Beam and concept
art by D[illegible]yes [illegible]
[illegible]s [illegible]ol [illegible]wer
and R[illegible]e Sugar

Blue & Yellow



Left [illegible] by Rebecca Sugar. **Below and opposite:** Blue and Yellow Diamond concept art by Rebecca Sugar.


WEAKNESS-
BLUE

The Off Colors

[illegible] Lars and Steven [illegible] the Off Colors as a secret group [illegible] because they [illegible] world society [illegible] because [illegible] Off Colors had [illegible] abandoned Kindergarten [illegible] underworld's surface [illegible] escape punishment [illegible] Lars's [illegible]

Rhymes [illegible] are [illegible] party [illegible] appearances by [illegible] Off Colors [illegible] this [illegible] they [illegible] sing [illegible] secrets [illegible] and [illegible] even [illegible] consternation [illegible] the [illegible] does [illegible] serve [illegible] purpose [illegible]

Lucy [illegible] also [illegible] a [illegible] passive [illegible] role [illegible] part [illegible] her [illegible] first [illegible] kiss [illegible] unspecified [illegible] Off Colors [illegible] size [illegible] expressive [illegible] any [illegible] nuances [illegible] say [illegible] and [illegible] she [illegible] is [illegible] a [illegible] grandma [illegible] caterpillar [illegible] with [illegible] many [illegible] arms [illegible] and [illegible] legs [illegible] She [illegible] speaks [illegible] slowly [illegible] [illegible] part [illegible] [illegible] stalk [illegible] [illegible] extra [illegible] coordinating [illegible] say [illegible] who [illegible] they [illegible] will [illegible] save [illegible] [illegible] She's [illegible] new [illegible] at [illegible] it [illegible] kids [illegible] suggested [illegible] she [illegible] would [illegible] add [illegible] color [illegible] [illegible] that [illegible] sort [illegible] thing [illegible]

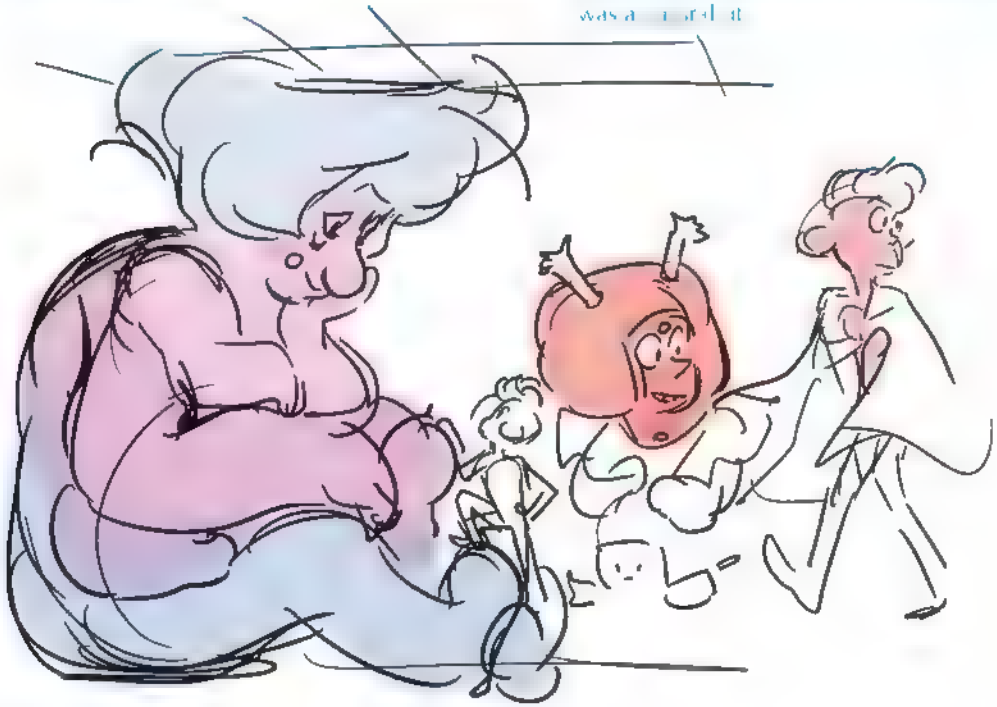
Padmanabhan [illegible] was [illegible] born [illegible] the [illegible] world [illegible] solely [illegible] because [illegible] their [illegible] powers [illegible] are [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] part [illegible] of [illegible] past

The Rhymes [illegible] are [illegible] a [illegible] bit [illegible] but [illegible] two [illegible] Off Colors [illegible] [illegible] waist [illegible] [illegible] stage [illegible] [illegible] eggs [illegible] because [illegible] were [illegible] afraid [illegible] [illegible] emerge [illegible] from [illegible] their [illegible] Kindergarten [illegible] the [illegible] Rhymes [illegible] scared [illegible] the [illegible] other [illegible] ones [illegible] with [illegible] was [illegible] the [illegible] reason [illegible] they [illegible] were [illegible] able [illegible] to [illegible] escape [illegible] to [illegible] begin [illegible]

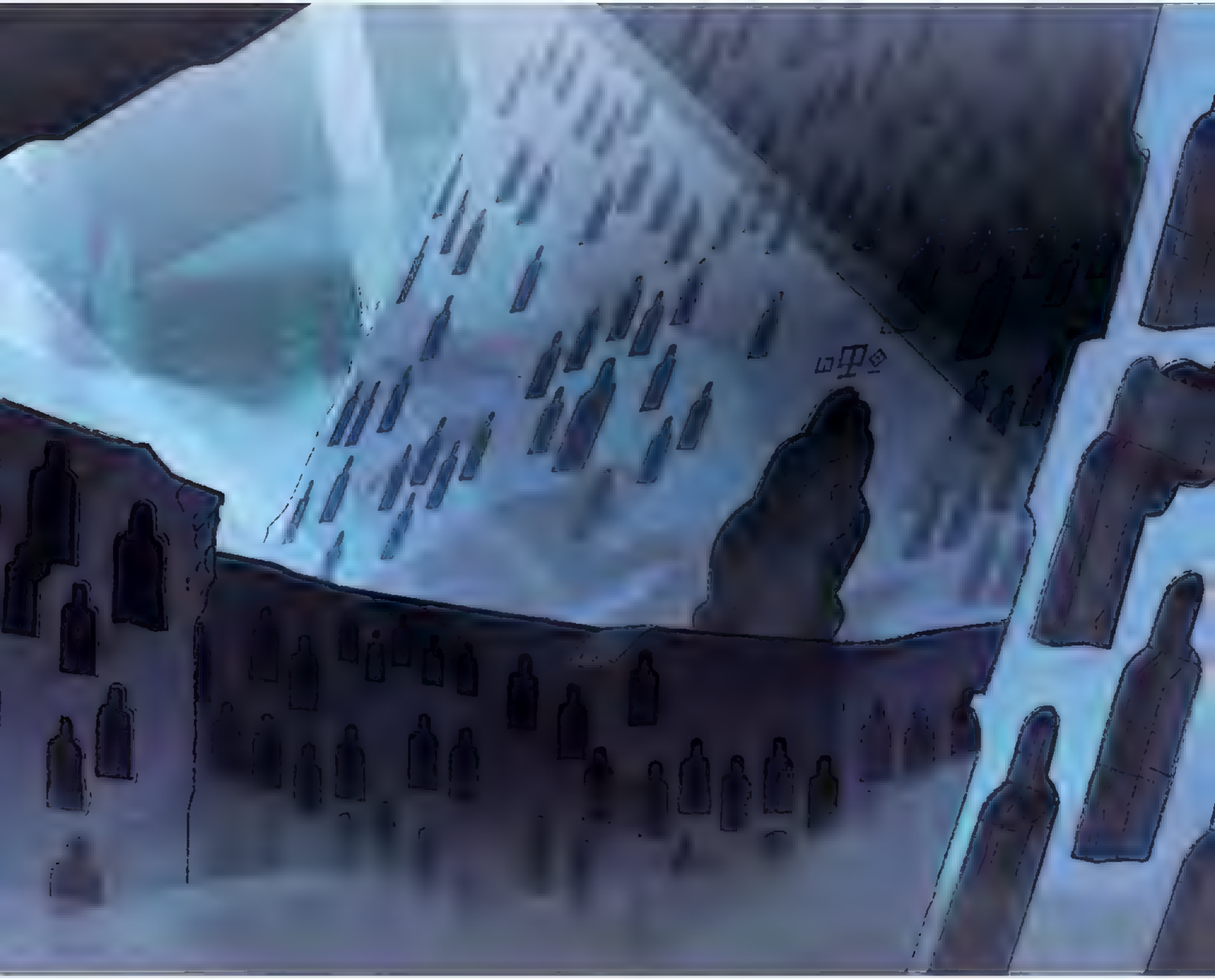
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] world [illegible] [illegible] the Off Colors [illegible] will [illegible] be [illegible] subject [illegible] to [illegible] standard [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] storming [illegible] woods [illegible] and [illegible] from

Ian Jones-Quartey [former co–executive producer]

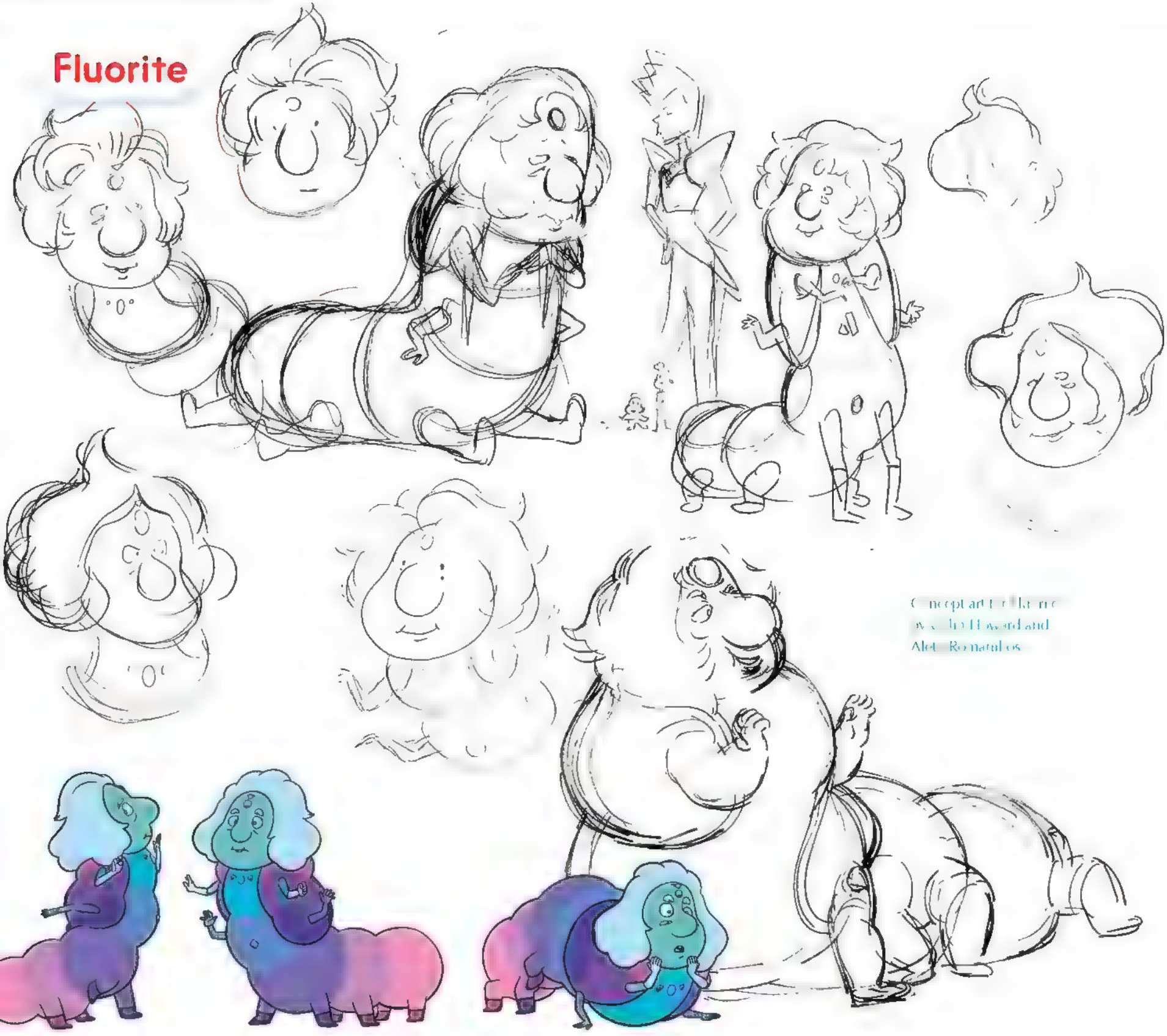
[illegible] Off Colors [illegible] one [illegible] [illegible] things [illegible] really [illegible] wanted [illegible] to [illegible] show [illegible] on [illegible] a [illegible] set [illegible] was [illegible] all [illegible] kinds [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] about [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] with [illegible] literally [illegible] [illegible] about [illegible] [illegible] existing [illegible] in [illegible] the [illegible] world [illegible] but [illegible] because [illegible] the [illegible] rainbows [illegible] those [illegible] Colors [illegible] would [illegible] have [illegible] to [illegible] say [illegible] Kindergarten [illegible] was [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] was [illegible] a [illegible] [illegible] at



Left [illegible] **Right** [illegible] by Steve Sagar, painted by Arantza Wolfenstein



Fluorite

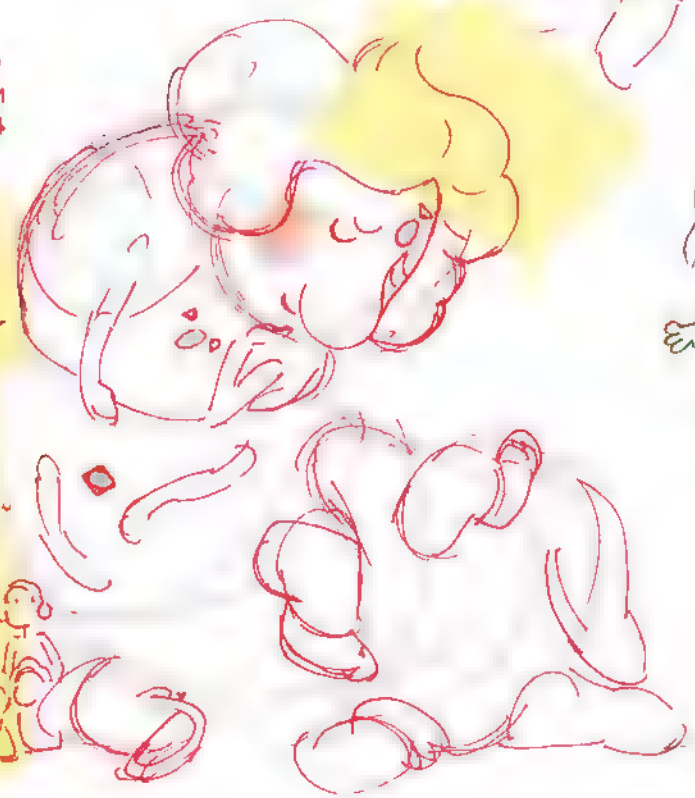


Concept art by Jaime Jacobo Howard and Alex Romanulos

Fluorite

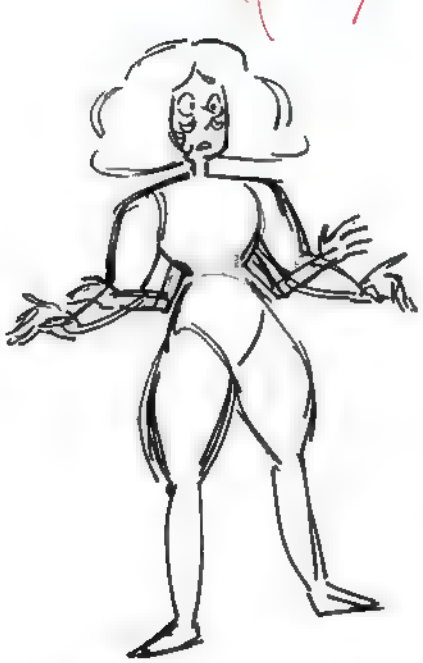
5 +H
THIN SMALL UPPER ARMS, x2
CHUBBY LEGS x3
BOOTIES + POTENTIAL SHAUL

SLIGHTLY DEFLATED MACH'S AM BALLOON



Concept art for Inside Opposite page, top left: This page: Red nose illustrated by Kenneth Sugar

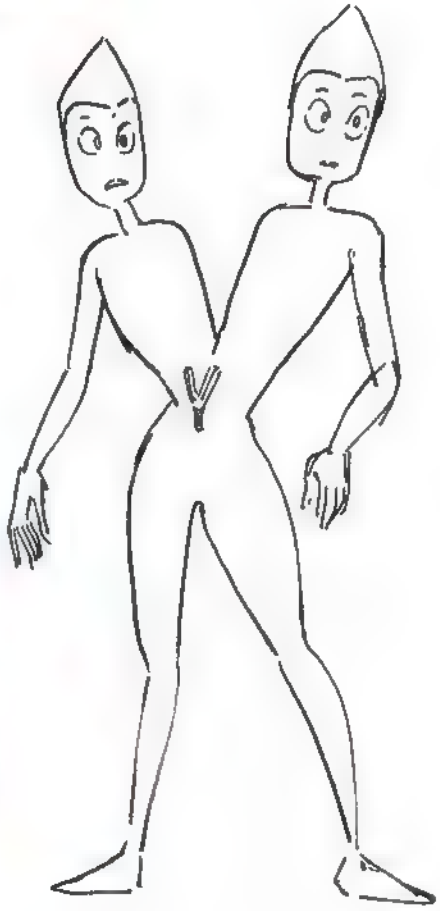
Rhodonite



Left: Rhodonite concept art by Rebecca Sugar. Above and right: Rhodonite concept art by Ian Jones-Quartey. Top right: Rhodonite concept art by Kat Morris.

Padparadscha & Rutile Twins

Padparadscha and Rutile Twins concept design by Rebecca Sugar. Final designs by Ashley Lanier.



Pink Lars

ars storyboard by [illegible]

Steven's Dream [illegible]

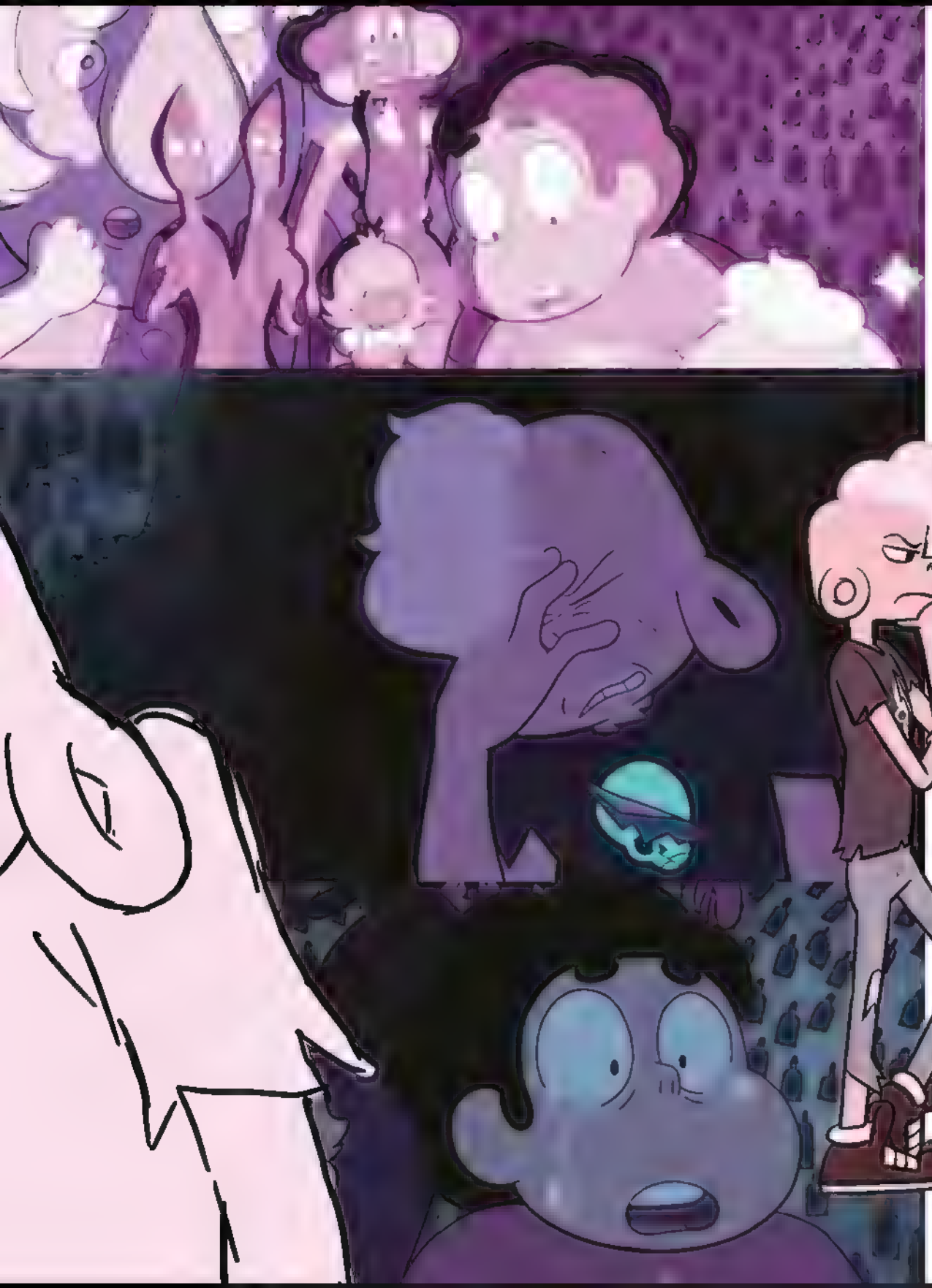
[illegible]

Opposite Story [illegible]

[illegible]

Story [illegible]

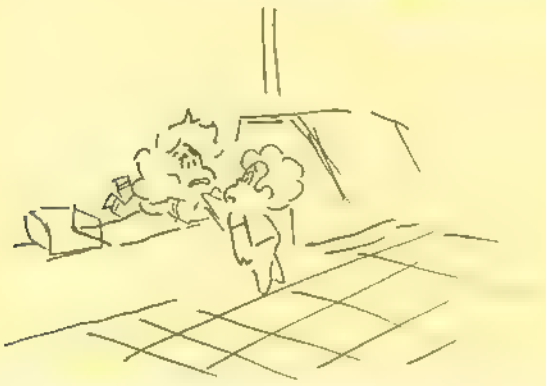
[illegible] **Below** Final design by Alex Komanikos



S: LARS IS STILL IN SPACE?

ST: YEAH... HE IS

ST: BUT DON'T WORRY,



S/A

ST: HE'S W/ SOME VERY NICE GEMS WHO HAVE ON THE RUN FROM THEIR HOME WORLD OVERLORDS...

THE TWO SIDES OF STEVEN'S LIFE: GEM MAGIC & ROCK N ROLL!

GREG IS A GREAT MANAGER!

SO PROUD!

SADIE RETURNS STE'S KINDNESS

RS'16

Above: Preliminary storyboard thumbnails by Lamar Abrams. **Right:** Concept art by Rebecca Sugar.

LARS & THE OFF COLORS
LARS GEM ADVENTURE!
SADIE HUMAN ADVENTURE!
BUCK! BAND
GET THEM OUT OF HERE! THEY'RE GOING TO FIND ALL OF US!
...
RHODONITE!
LIL CHUBBY UPPER ARMS
FLUORITE
RUBY THAT WANTS TO WEAR LIMB ENHANCERS
5 PERSON PERMAFUSION
RUBY + PEARL FUSION
QUARTZES THAT DON'T WANT TO FIGHT
TYPES THAT ARE NOT THEIR USUAL COLOR
AND—??

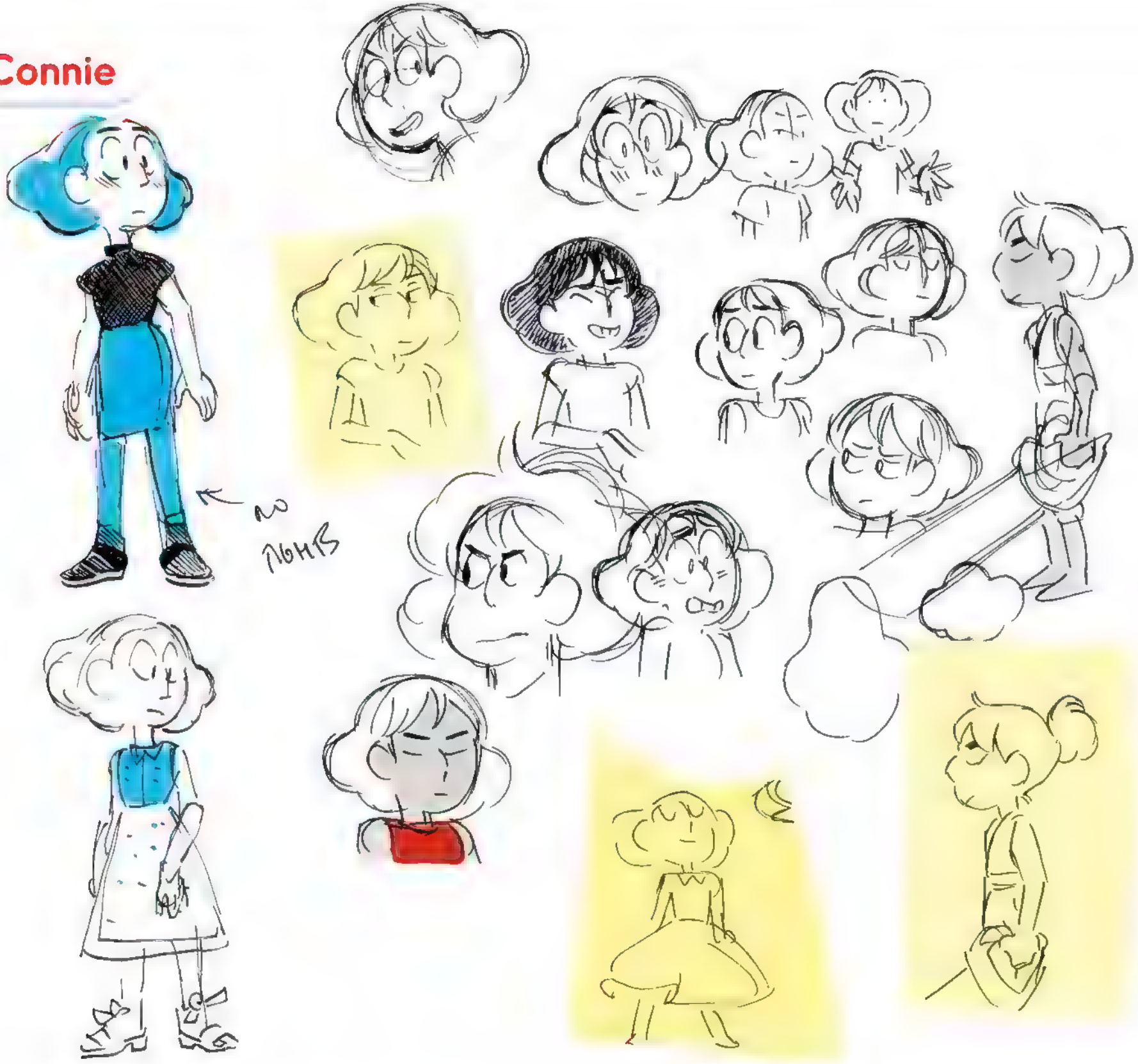
"Sadie Killer"

[illegible] sketches by Ka[illegible]

Crew Cameos

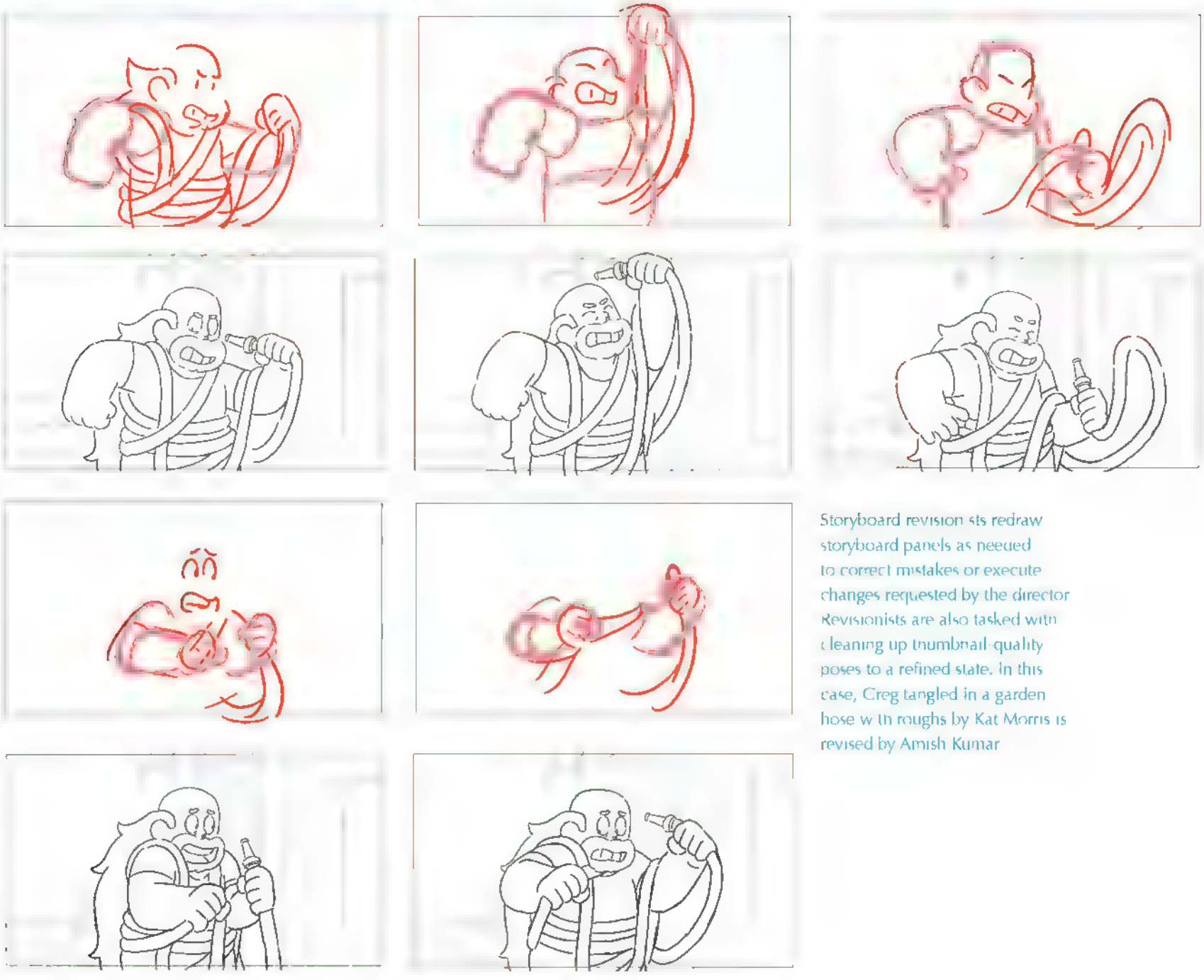
Extra character design models based off the *Steven Universe* crew, many of which have been used in previous episodes, make up the ultra-cool party guests of Kevin's party in the episode "Kevin Party" (S5E10). From left to right, Amish, Kat, Amanda, Angie, Lamar, Emily, Mary, Joe, Christy, Danny C., Hilary, Danny H., Matt, Ben, and Elle

Connie

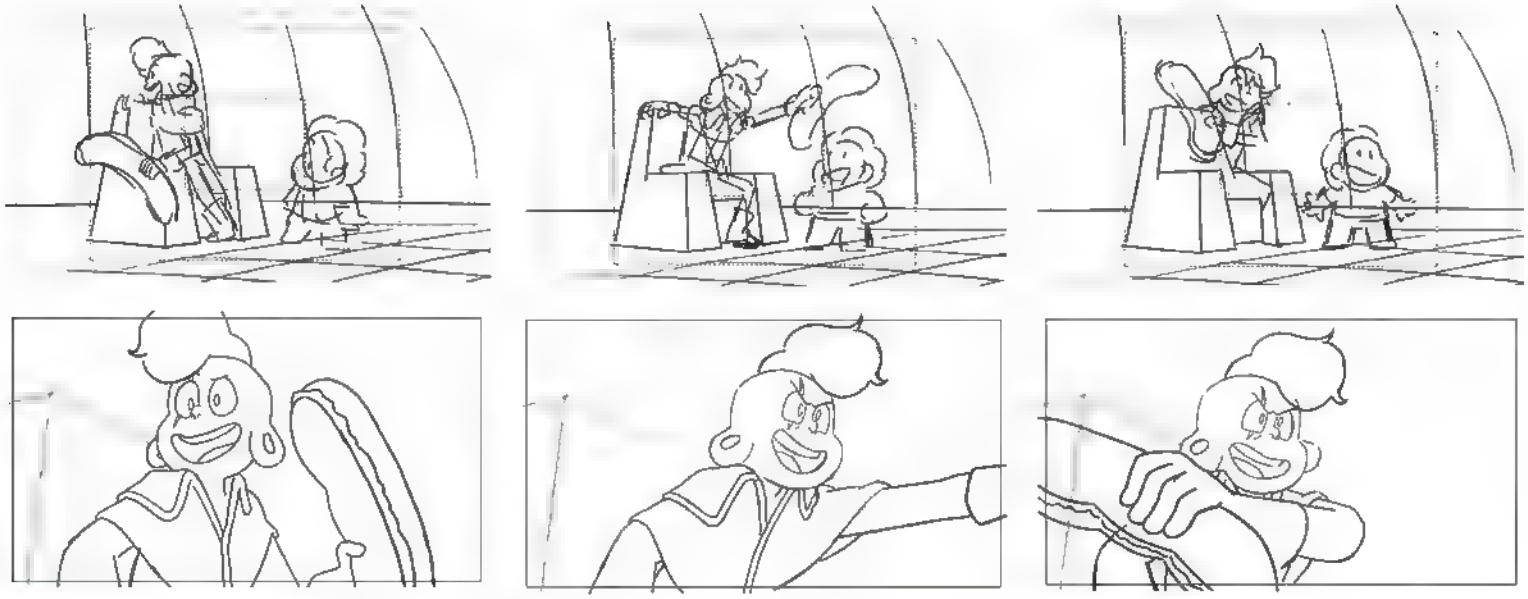


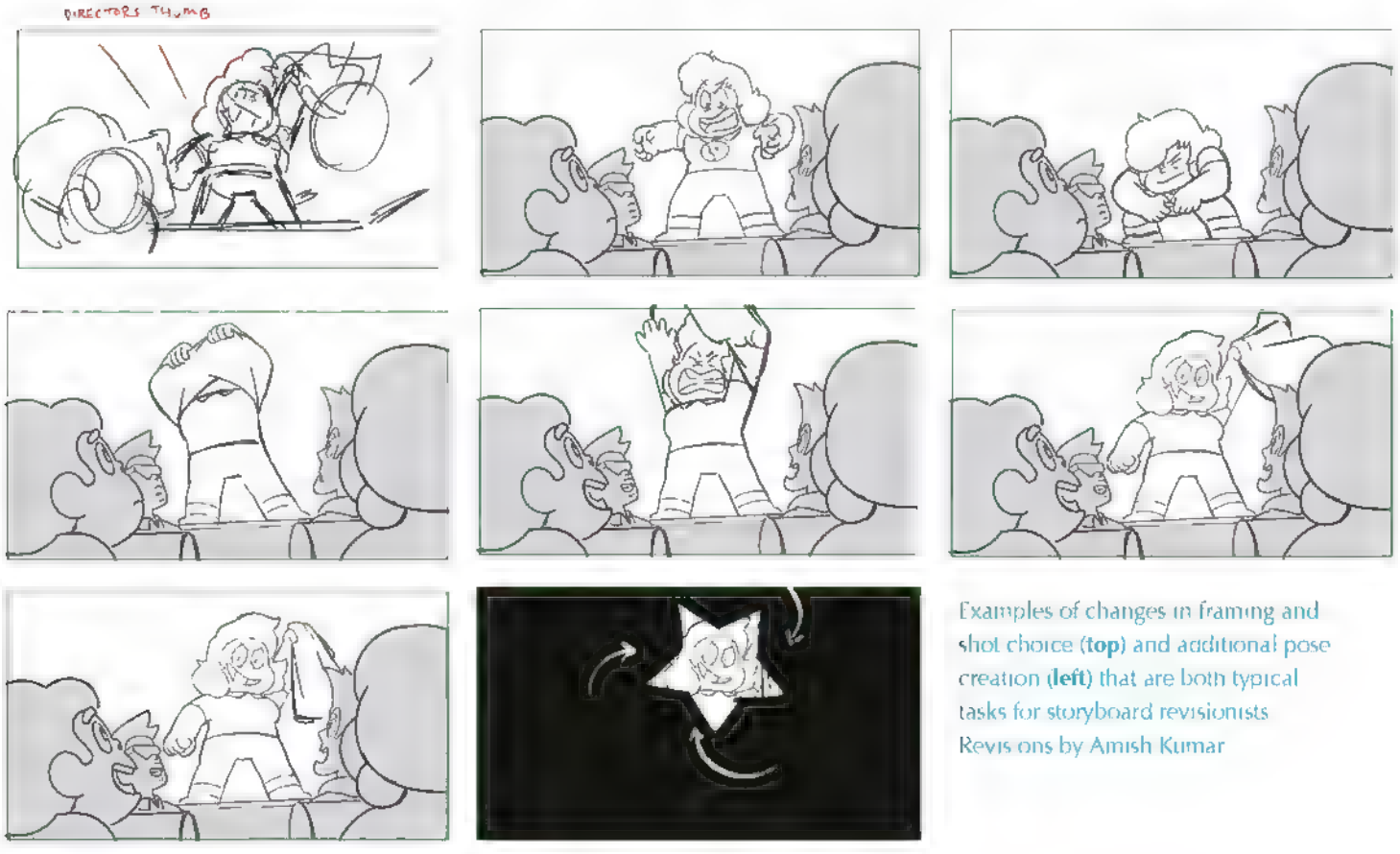
Co[illegible]es upga[illegible]d look is revealed when Stevonnie sees her aga[illegible]ance as "Kevin Party" (S5 E10). Co[illegible]ept by Kat Morris and Rebecca Sugar.

Storyboard Revisions



Storyboard revisionists redraw storyboard panels as needed to correct mistakes or execute changes requested by the director. Revisionists are also tasked with cleaning up thumbnail-quality poses to a refined state. In this case, Greg tangled in a garden hose with roughs by Kat Morris is revised by Amish Kumar.

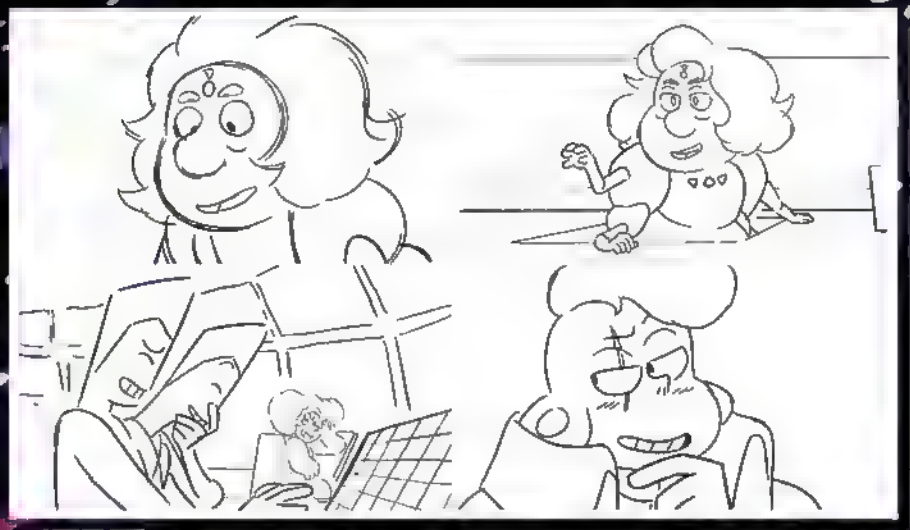


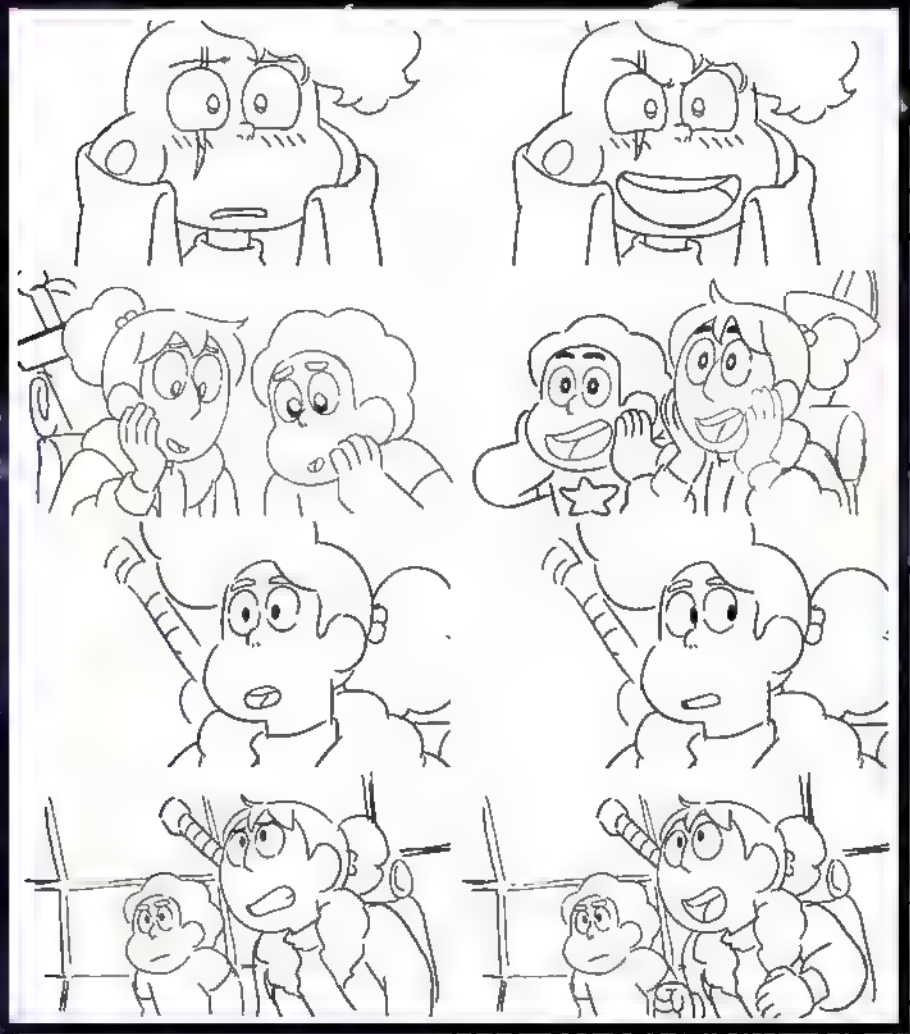


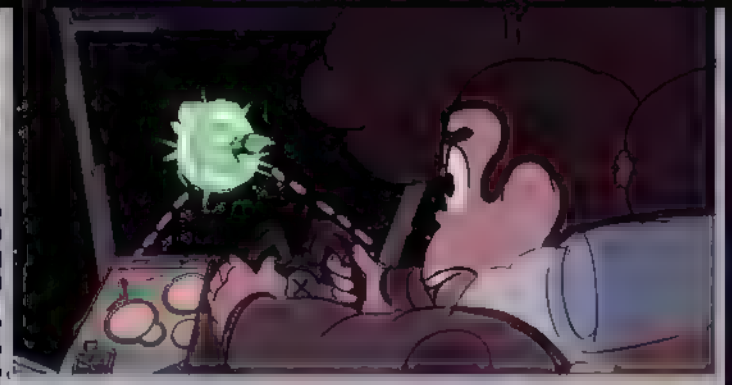
Examples of changes in framing and shot choice (**top**) and additional pose creation (**left**) that are both typical tasks for storyboard revisionists
Revisions by Amish Kumar

"Lars of the Stars"

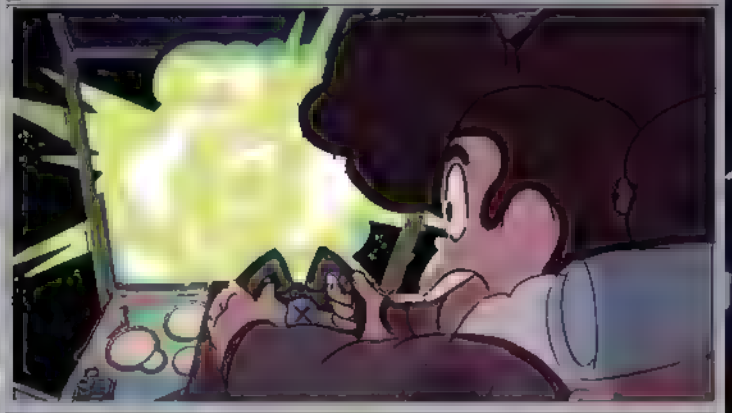
Above: Drawing by Rebecca Sugar. **Right:** "Lars of the Stars" (S5E11) personal artwork created by Aleth Romanillos. **Opposite:** Storyboard panels from the episode by Kat Morris (**left**) and color key artwork for the animation production studio's reference (**right**), from storyboards by Lamar Abrams, colored by Liz Artiman



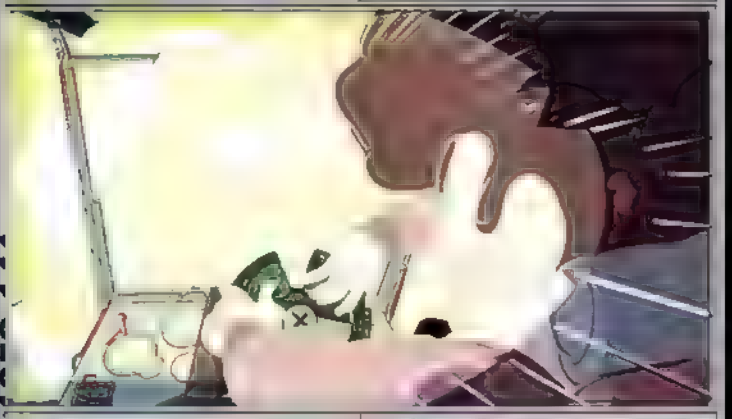




Scene	Panel
165	3

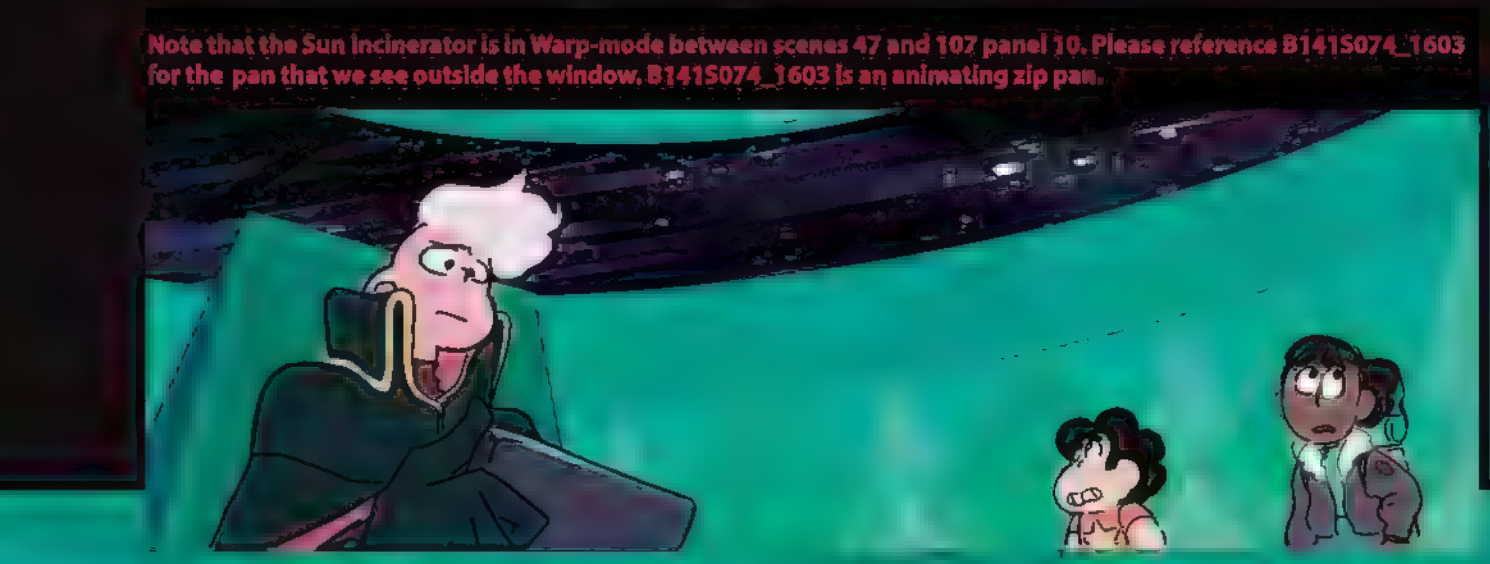


Scene	Panel
165	4

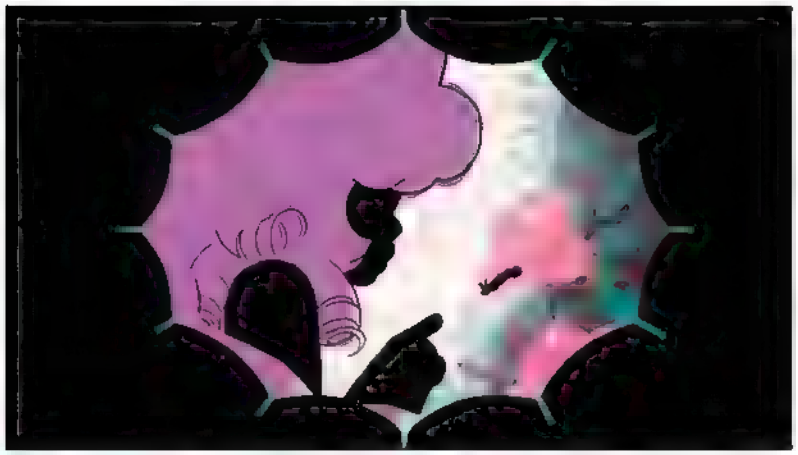


Scene	Panel
165	5

Left: Stills from "Lars of the Stars" (S5E11). **Above.** Emerald concept ar by Rebecca Sugar

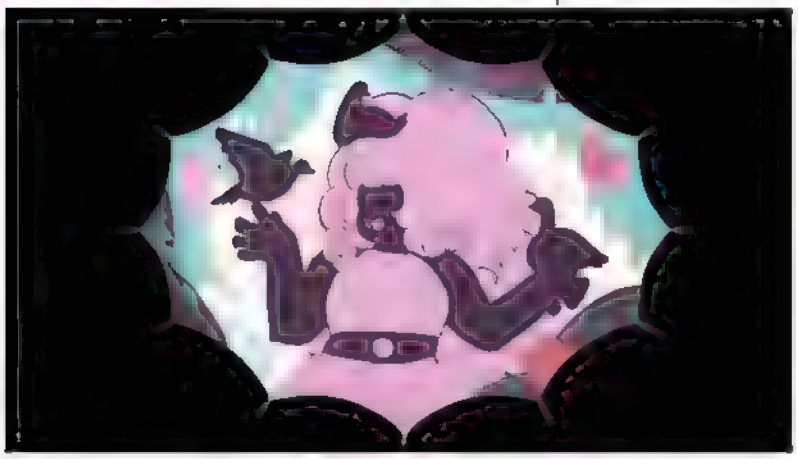

Note that the Sun Incinerator is in Warp-mode between scenes 47 and 107 panel 10. Please reference B1415074_1603 for the pan that we see outside the window. B1415074_1603 is an animating zip pan.

Left. Color mock-up art with notes for the animation studio **Below:** Background art of the Sun Incinerator interior. Line art for "Lars of the Stars" by Steven Sugar, Mary Nash and Janet Sak background paint by Patrick Bryson



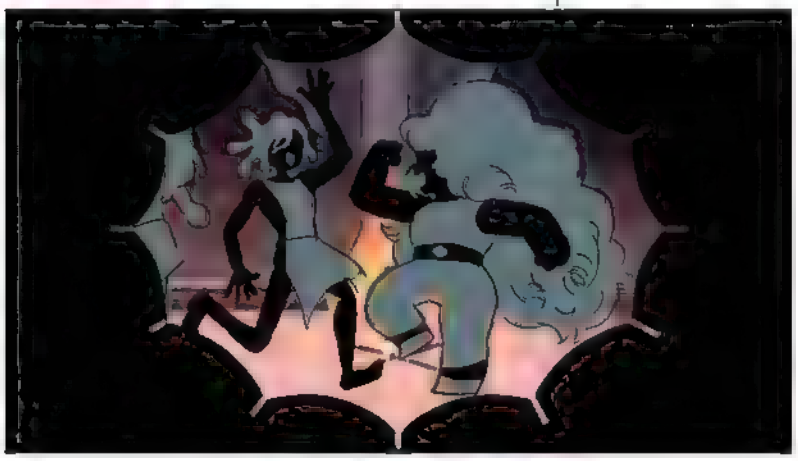
Fairytale - Era One - Early Earth Exterior - Appreciation

COLOR ONLY. Black frame is a prop.



Fairytale - Era One - Early Earth Cave - Fondness

COLOR ONLY. Figures on BG around fire are propped out.

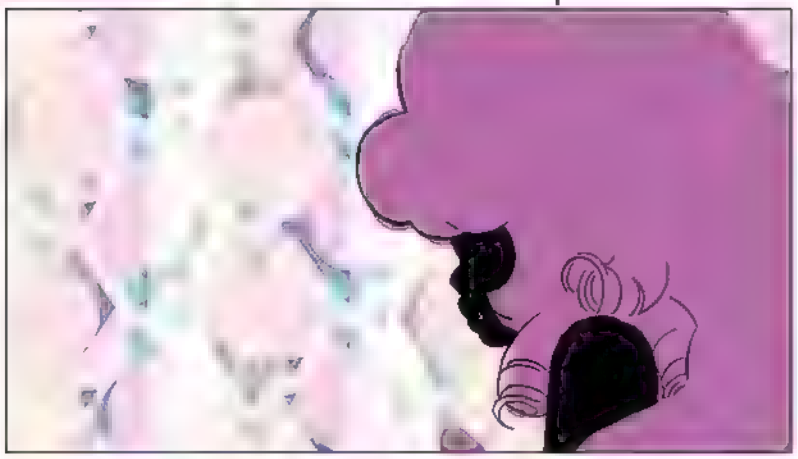


Fairytale - Era One - Early Earth Exterior - Love

Color Only

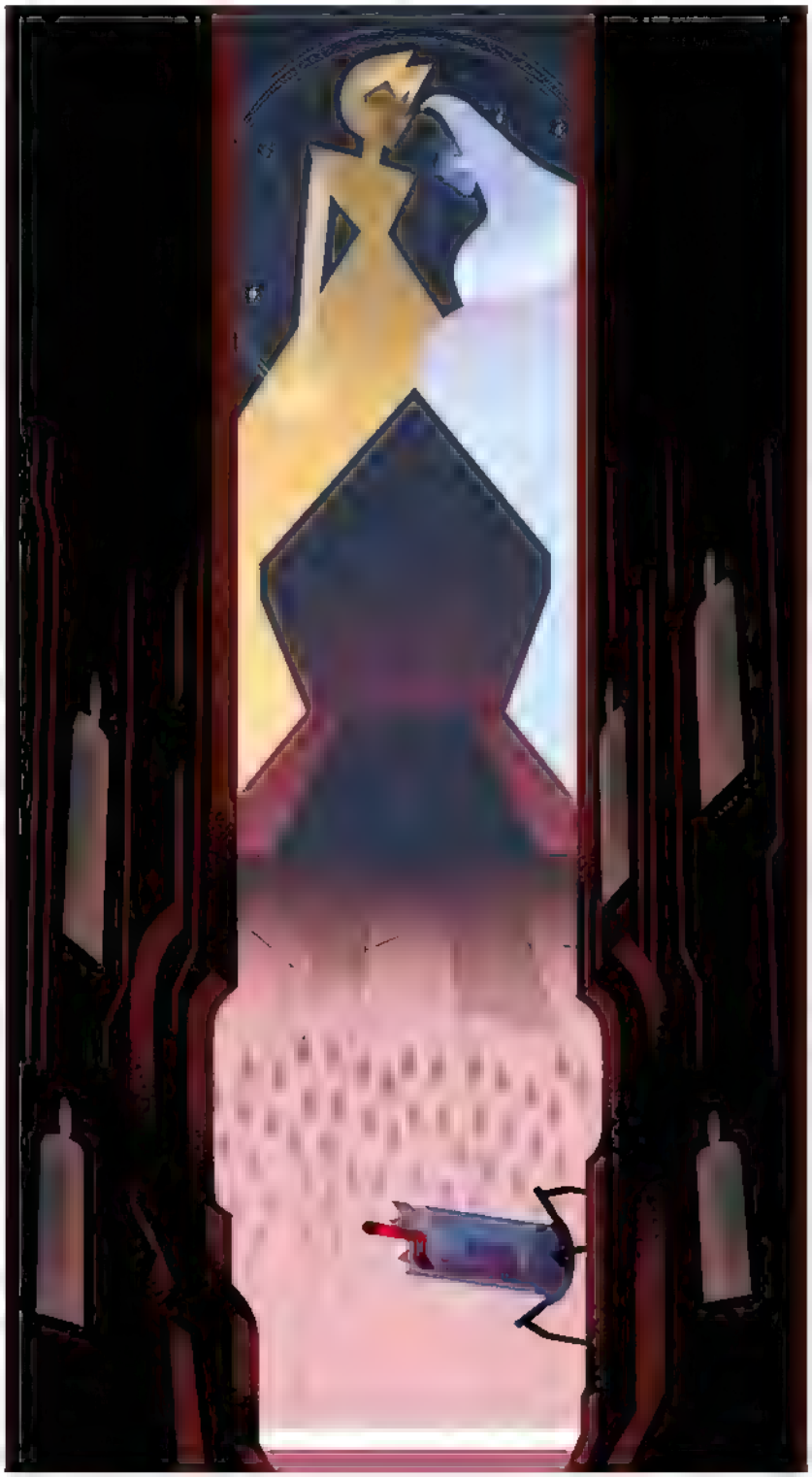
Fairytale - Era One - Rose's Plea Card

Color Only



Fairytale - Era One - Rose's Plea Card

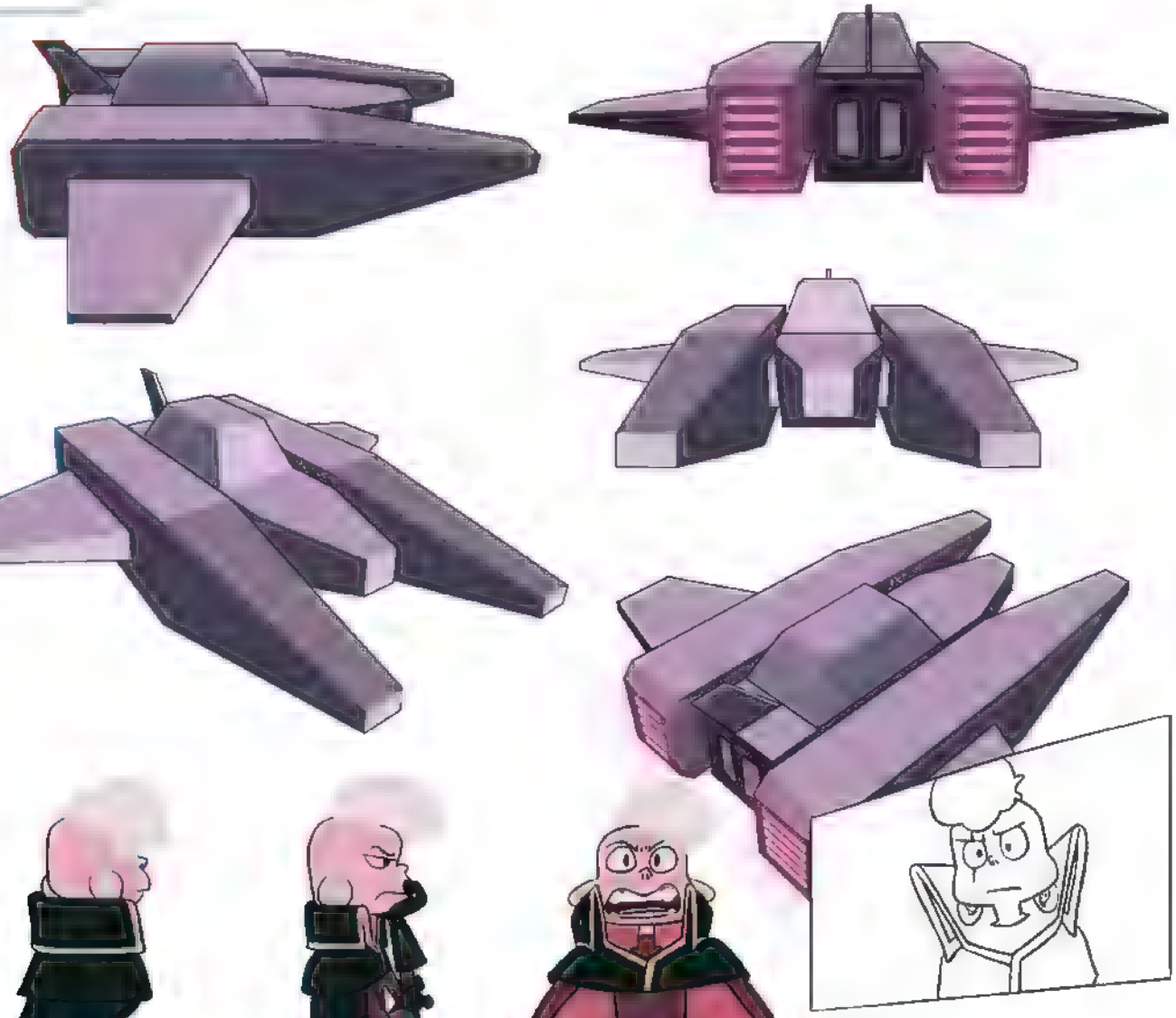
Color Only



Larry Leonardi sequence concept art for "Sugar Mother and Mister Sol" by Lisa Mirenska. Storyboards by Kevin Mitro.

"Lars of the Stars"

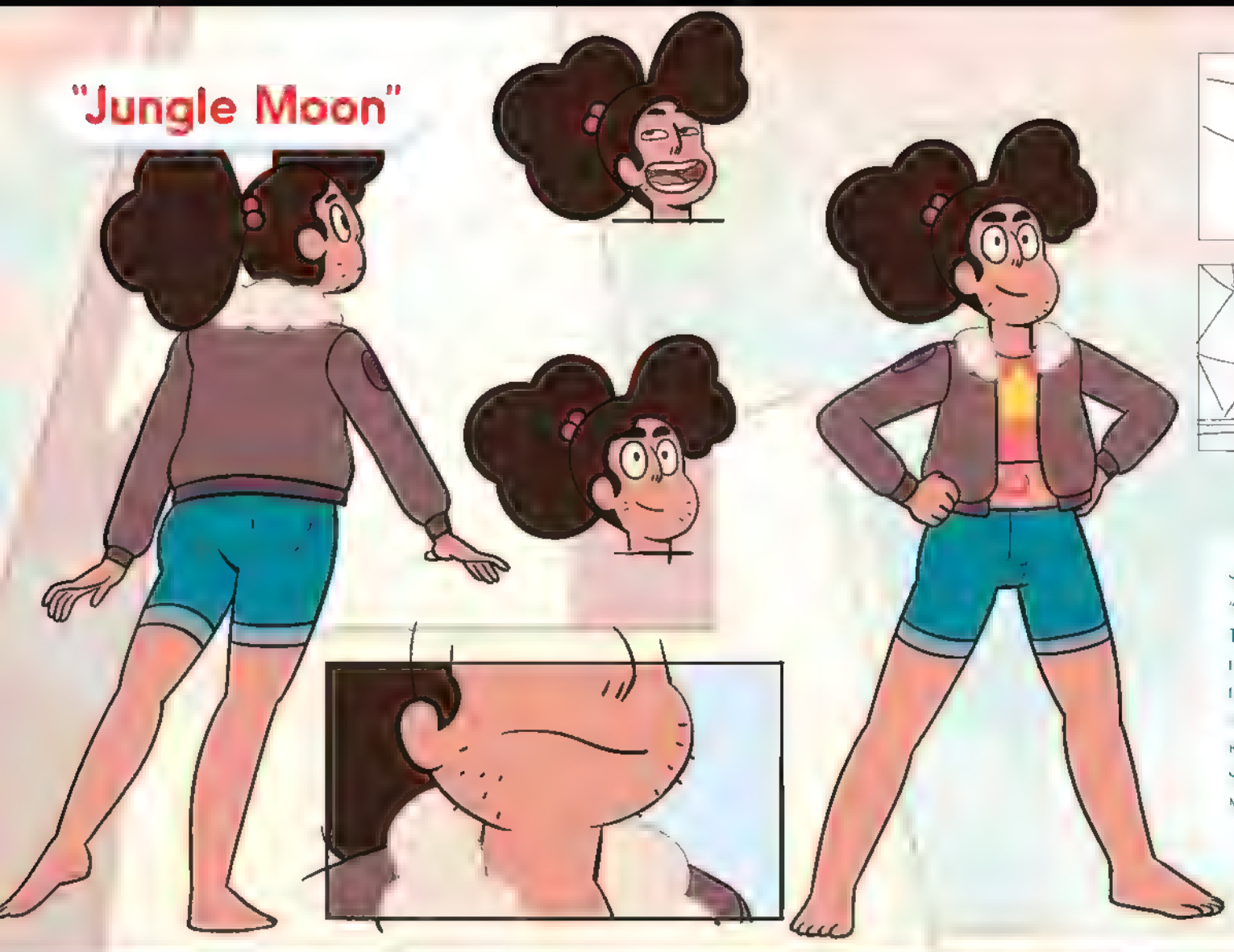
Right. The Star Skipper design which debuted in "Lars of the Stars" (S5E11). Prop design by Angie Wang. **Below.** Lars model design from the same episode, by Aleth Romanillos. **Opposite** Background artwork from "Jungle Moon" (S5E12). Line art by Steven Sugar. Painted by Patrick Bryson



"Jungle Moon"

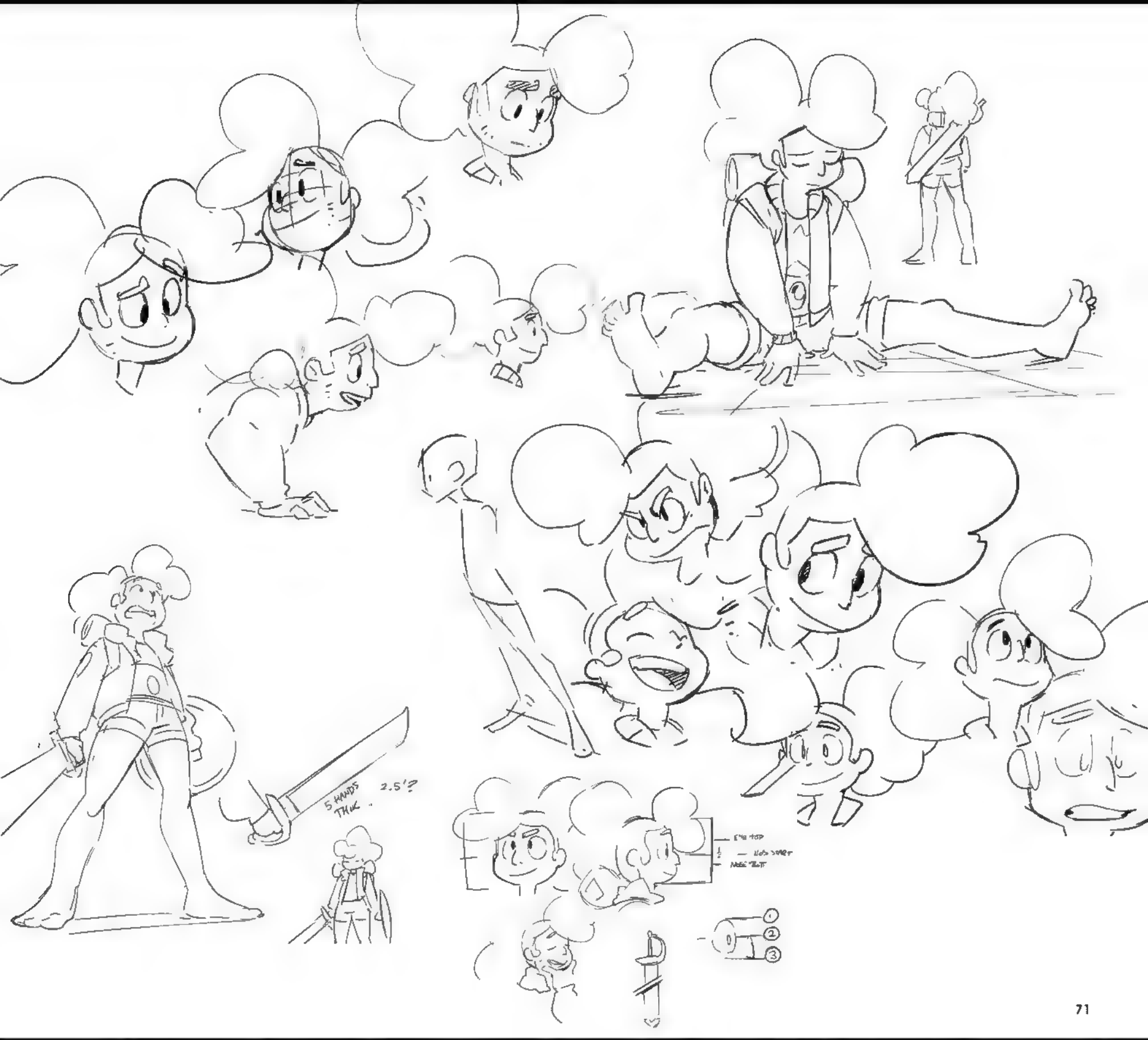
Background art and color key mock-ups from "Jungle Moon" (season 2). Patrick Brys new woman ... is a ... original Ad... ... Award ... 2010 as a background painter ... this episode. **Opposite bottom:** Part of ... by Patrick Brysan. **This page and opposite top:** Painted ... Liz Art...

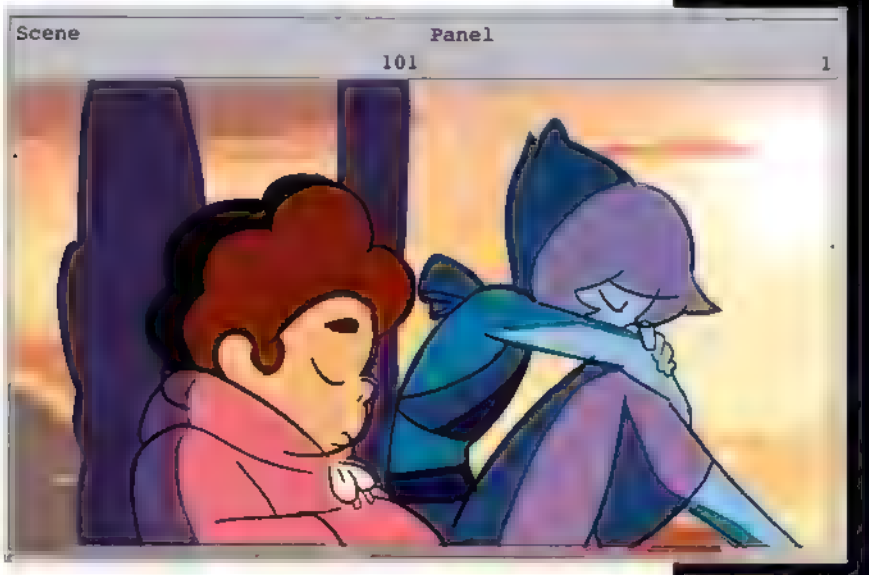
"Jungle Moon"



* OPTIONS ON BOARD

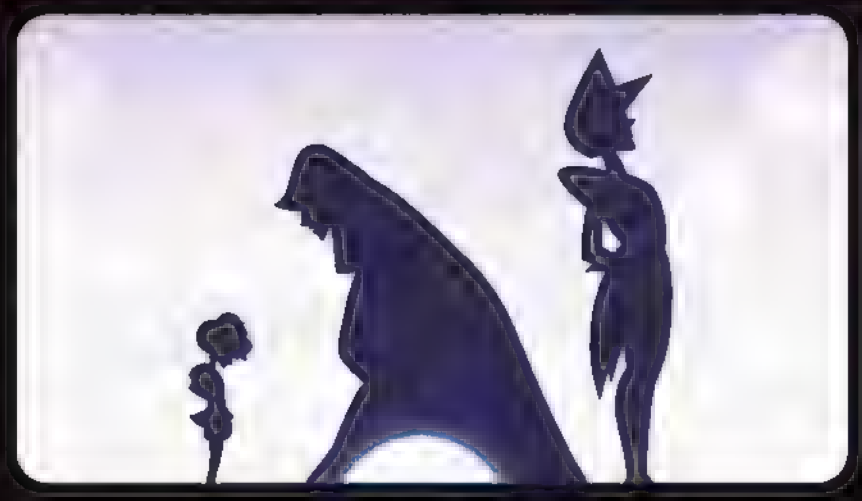
Steven stars in "Jungle Moon." Page 70 **This page:** Character model and art assets from the episode, as well as design by Ali Romanchuk. **Opposite:** Steven sketches by Miki Brewster.

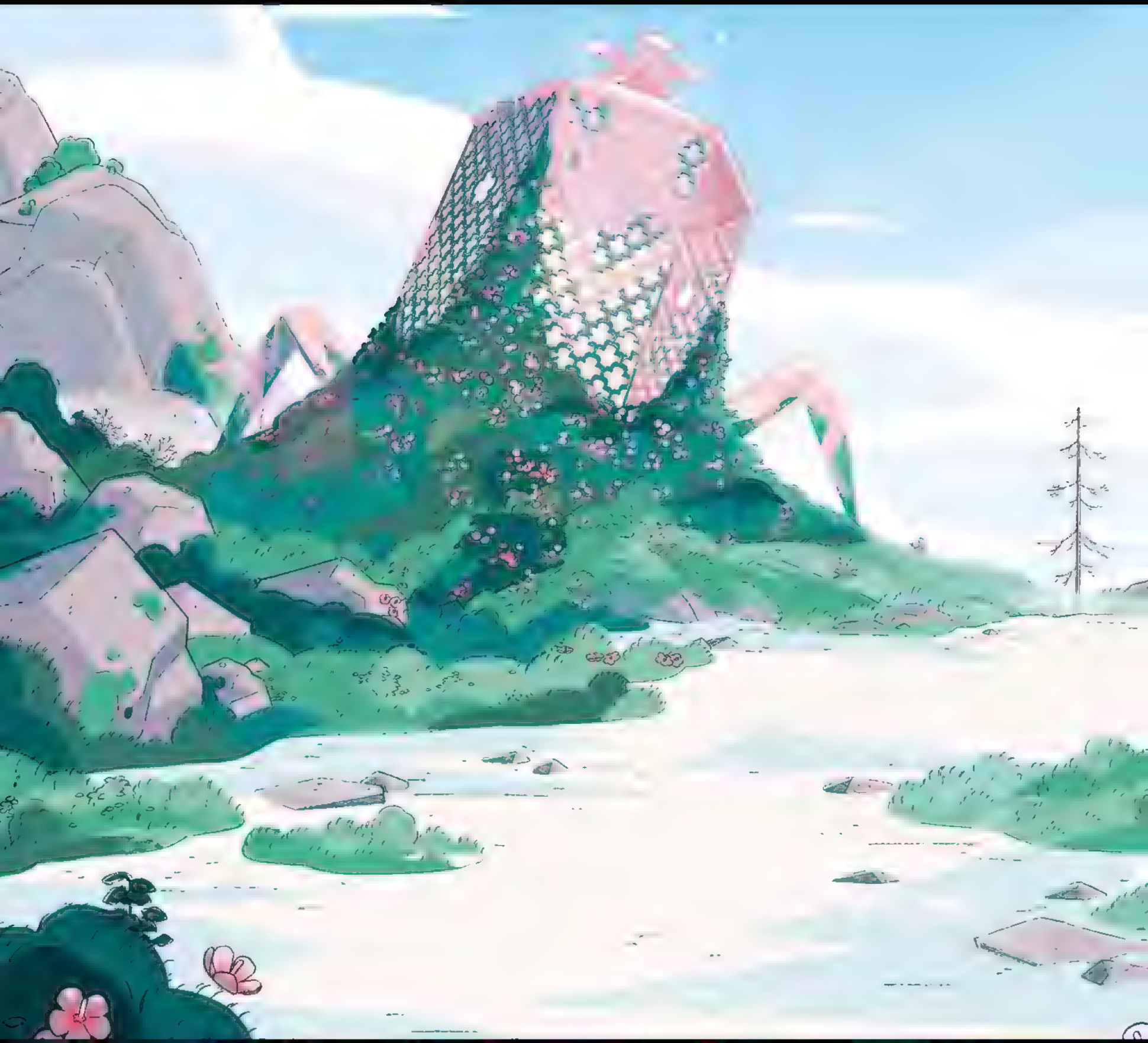

5 HANDS THICK
2.5'?



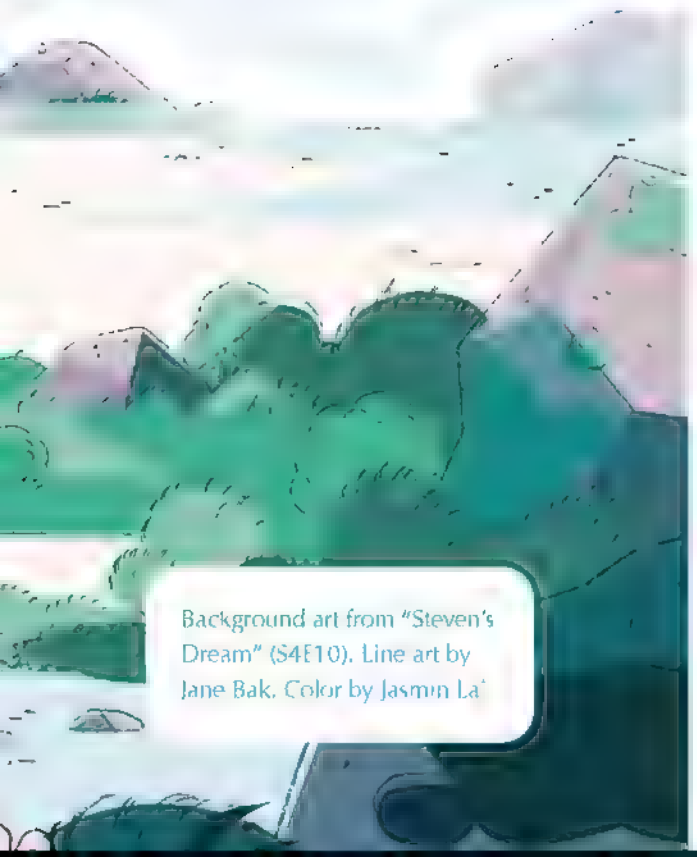
This page A s[illegible] from "Can I Go Back to Sch[illegible] Line art by Steven Sugar Mary Nass and [illegible] Background and paint by Patrick Brys[illegible]

Opposite Steven s[illegible] Pink Diamond appears [illegible] and he possesses creation by Brys[illegible] and Yes[illegible]





2: THE BEGINNING OF THE END: A SINGLE PALE ROSE



Background art from "Steven's Dream" (S4E10). Line art by Jane Bak. Color by Jasmin La'

Steven Universe's tale is a slow burn. Completely conceptualized in broad strokes by Rebecca from the very beginning, the long arc of Steven's story—from season one to season five and even into six—was rolled out carefully and deliberately. Like Steven, the audience began the journey innocent of knowledge about Gem battles, betrayal, and magic, and then learned alongside him.

The pacing was intentional, to avoid overwhelming the viewer with information about Gem technology, terminology, and society all at once. Each important revelation about Steven's powers or his understanding of the Gem or human worlds was the focus of one episode at a time. Each new concept was important for audiences to understand subsequent storylines. Always peppered in were slice-of-life stories that focused on Steven's beach-town neighbors and friends. "You've got to earn it," agreed original series writers Ben Levin and Matt Burnett when they joined Rebecca on *The Steven Universe Podcast*. Each reveal in the story had to be meaningful for the characters—especially for Steven, since the show has always been designed to be from his perspective.

Like a twenty-thousand-year-long puzzle, all the main elements that built the larger *Steven Universe* mythos were laid out on the proverbial table. Putting them in order, one reveal after another, building the story, was the logical challenge. It was like "painting a picture across time" or "building a staircase," says Rebecca. The process involved countless hours writing and hashing out the connective details in meetings with the wider crew.

Rebecca Sugar [series creator]: We knew that we wanted to design episodes that felt self contained but still gave the characters a new piece of information or changed them fundamentally.

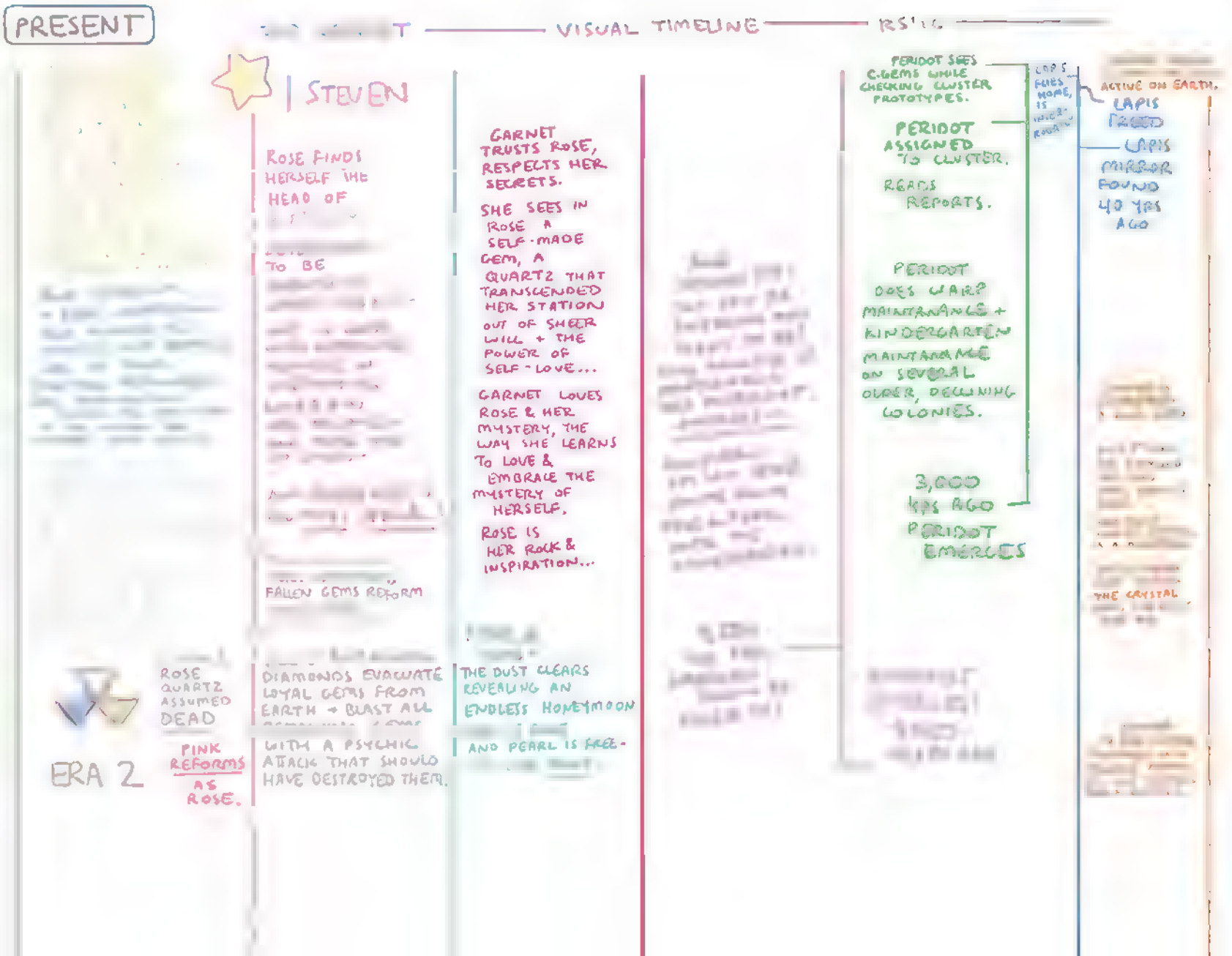
Steven Universe's story takes seasons, not just episodes, to tell, and requires a more or less chronological viewing. The audience experiences Steven growing up, both as a human and as a Gem. The other main characters each have development arcs as well, and the relationships among them evolve

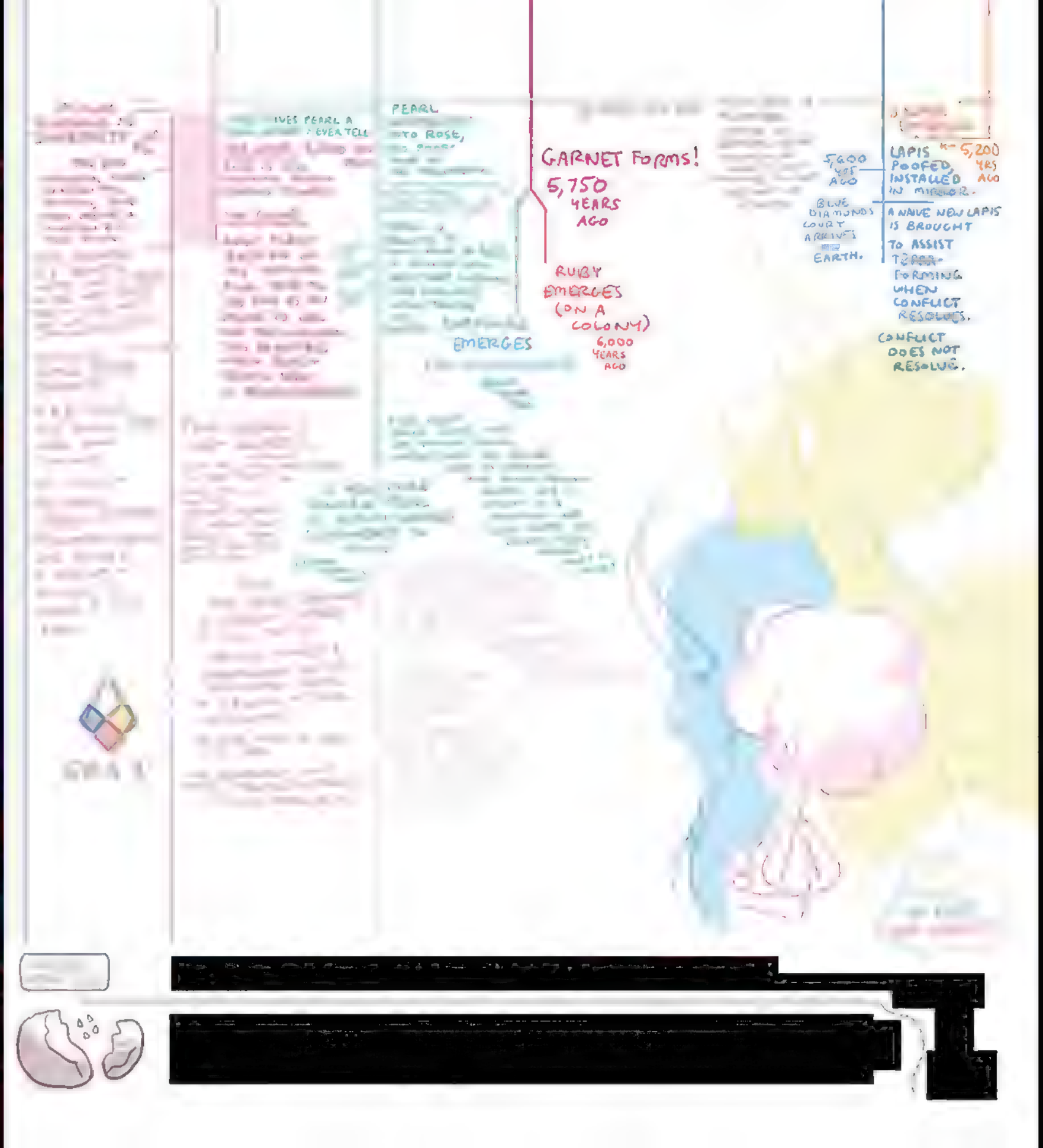
Rebecca: The structure that I originally laid out is what we had to work with; we knew why the characters were the way that they were. We knew about Rose and Pearl and Pink, and we knew that the Crystal Gems had joined Rose, and we knew that they didn't know what Pearl knew. Amethyst came a little later than everyone else. The idea that Amethyst and then later Jasper were created

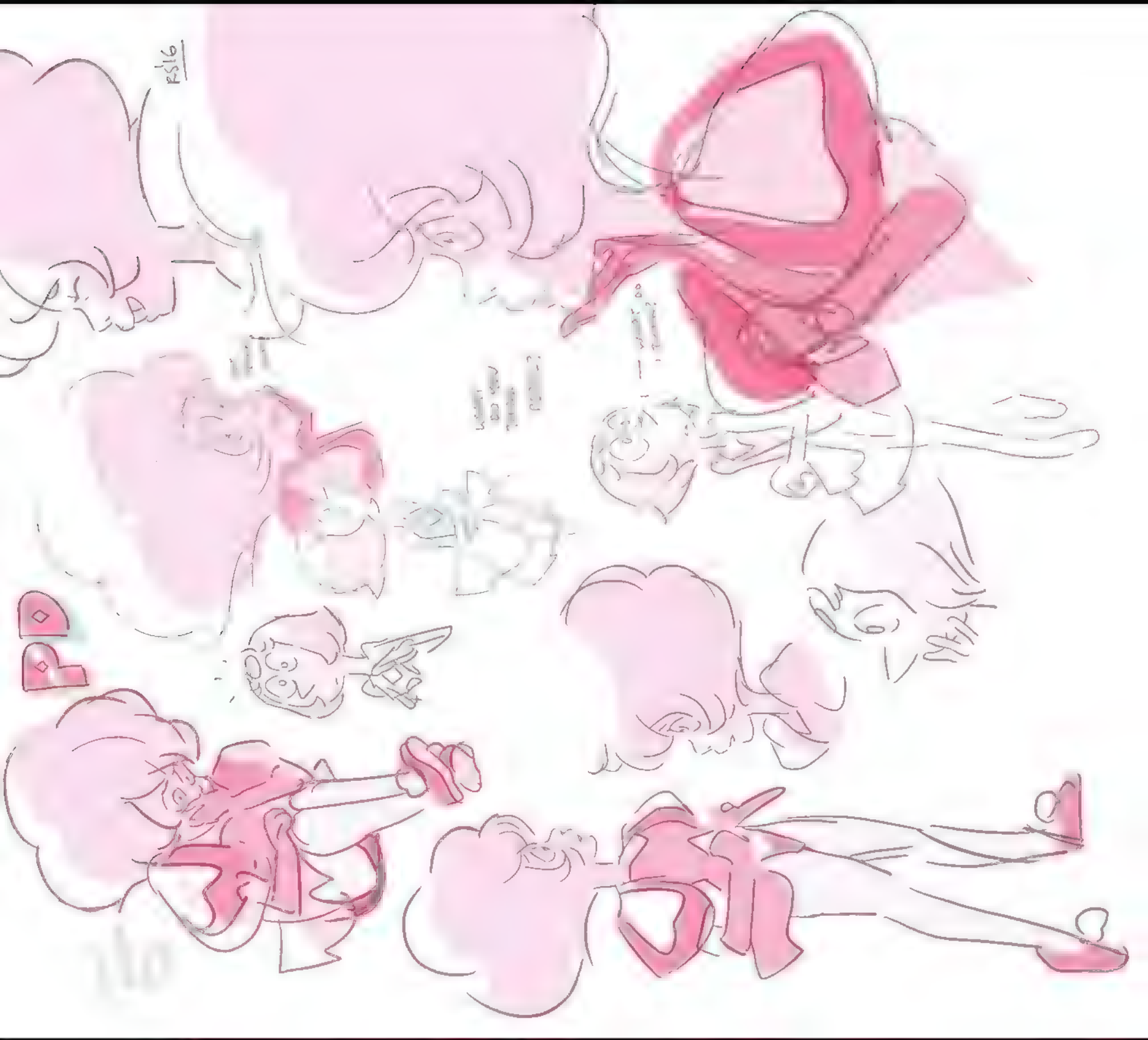
(Continued on page 80)

Timeline

Rebecca Sugar [illegible] Pink Pearl's story, in which the Super Diamonds destroy the first group of Pink. This is also [illegible] concept art [illegible] spread [illegible] predates the [illegible] of White controlling Pink Pearl or the [illegible] Pink Pearl's eye which was invented while working on Change Your Mind in 2015. In an even later version of Pink Pearl's story, Pink Diamond is now [illegible] guilt [illegible] Steven Universe Future, we returned to a small [illegible] of this earlier idea. This timeline also misses Spinel [illegible] have the green gel for the movie at this time.


PRESENT
VISUAL TIMELINE
STEVEN
ROSE FINDS HERSELF THE HEAD OF
TO BE
FALLEN GEMS REFORM
GARNET TRUSTS ROSE, RESPECTS HER SECRETS.
SHE SEES IN ROSE A SELF-MADE GEM, A QUARTZ THAT TRANSCENDED HER STATION OUT OF SHEER WILL + THE POWER OF SELF-LOVE...
GARNET LOVES ROSE & HER MYSTERY, THE WAY SHE LEARNS TO LOVE & EMBRACE THE MYSTERY OF HERSELF.
ROSE IS HER ROCK & INSPIRATION...
PERIDOT SEES C-GEMS WHILE CHECKING CLUSTER PROTOTYPES.
PERIDOT ASSIGNED TO CLUSTER.
READS REPORTS.
PERIDOT DOES WARP MAINTENANCE + KINDERGARTEN MAINTENANCE ON SEVERAL OTHER, DECLINING COLONIES.
3,000 YRS AGO PERIDOT EMERGES
ACTIVE ON EARTH.
LAPIS FREED
LAPIS MIRROR FOUND 40 YRS AGO
THE CRYSTAL
ROSE QUARTZ ASSUMED DEAD
DIAMONDS EVACUATE LOYAL GEMS FROM EARTH → BLAST ALL
WITH A PSYCHIC ATTACK THAT SHOULD HAVE DESTROYED THEM.
THE DUST CLEARS REVEALING AN ENDLESS HONEYMOON
AND PEARL IS FREE-
PINK REFORMS AS ROSE.
ERA 2


PEARL
GARNET FORMS!
5,750 YEARS AGO
RUBY EMERGES (ON A COLONY) 6,000 YEARS AGO
EMERGES
5,400 YRS AGO
LAPIS POOFED, INSTALLED IN MIRROR. 5,200 YRS AGO
BLUE DIAMONDS COURT ARRIVES EARTH.
A NAIVE NEW LAPIS IS BROUGHT TO ASSIST
FORMING WHEN CONFLICT RESOLVES.
CONFLICT DOES NOT RESOLVE.



Concept art by
Rebecca Sugar

(Continued from page 75)

on Earth is something that we came up with as a group. It felt fun to write Amethyst a little more like a sibling. We knew their archetypes. We started with the characters and their relationships to Steven, and as we developed the lore it was all about supporting the character stories. So we were filling in these missing pieces, but only if they informed how the characters were behaving with one another.

I started with looser goals. It wasn't tightly mapped. By the time we got to 2016 we were really digging into this part of the story [where Steven learns some of the primary secrets of the series]. We started planting hints for the things we knew we'd eventually get to—like the fact that Rose is Pink Diamond and that Pearl has always been with her—these things are seeded in the very earliest episodes. Obsidian, too, the Crystal Gems' fusion, is represented as the Temple's form throughout the entire show, and even Obsidian's sword is part of the Temple's structure but has broken off and is sitting underwater. You can see it in "Bubble Buddies" [S1E7], and again in "Ocean Gem" [S1E26], when the ocean is gone. We wanted to hide everything in plain sight.

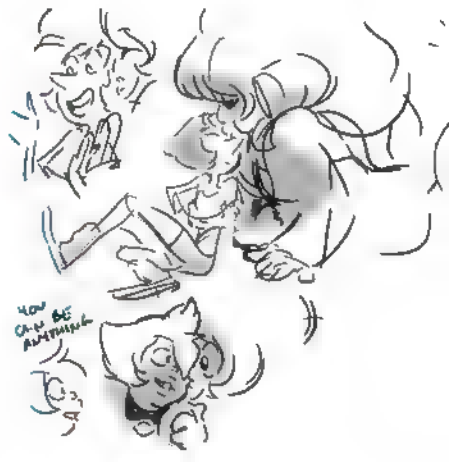
We also knew from the very beginning that our Pearl wasn't Pink's first.

Ian Jones-Quartey [former co–executive producer] I've never worked on a show with such an extensive timeline before. On *Adventure Time* the timeline was pretty loose, but the timeline and mythos of *Steven Universe* was very extensive and very figured out. The adjustments we made along the way never changed the overall timeline; it was just to add detail as we went. Sometimes you just had to invent stuff, and we did, but it was very fun to have the timeline there.

Rebecca's method for managing all these character arcs and plots involved creating detailed charts. These charts are revealed in full for the first time in this book.

Rebecca: I've mentioned that I make charts in interviews before because people will ask, "How did you keep this story straight?" When I talk to people who run animated television shows, I've found that usually, with an ongoing story like this, you would have to script it because all the interweaving elements and all the details and all the lore have to be tracked. A lot of people who are in the industry and who are telling overarching stories with episode-to-episode, season-to-season continuity, their main question to me is "How are you doing this as a storyboard-driven show? How can you do this and still be handing the writing off to a team of people who might change the story?" Because a lot of details change or are invented when the boarders get the outline and draw their storyboards. The whole thing has been like this: The details of the lore have evolved because our storyboarders took the original premise and drew something that built on it but in a new direction. So the story elements have to be on wheels a little bit so we can adjust to how the storyboarders change things.

Then there are things that are so fun and that make so much sense, but that only come into existence because the storyboarder's fresh eyes hit it and they take it away and bring it back into a room full of people who are really closely tied to this story and to the characters. That's basically my answer to the people who ask, "How can you do this without scripting it?" We spend hours and hours in the pitch room discussing everything that gets made, trying to make sure that it's supporting the point of the overall story and that the details are relating. And sometimes it's really noodle-y, like, "Well, Steven came up with the term 'poofing,' so what do Homeworld Gems call it?" Or "What is a Homeworld Gem insult that would really frustrate a Crystal Gem?" Because you need to feel that there's a logic and history behind everything Gems say and do, even if Steven doesn't understand the weight or context of some Gem-specific statement. We feel that logic out together as a team. We sit down and write a bunch of jargon as a group, or I'll kind of squirrel away and then come back with insults to pitch—stuff like that.



Above: Steven and Connie sketches by Kat Morris. **Right:** Rose and Pearl sketches by Rebecca Sugar

That's really why I started making the charts: so that everyone would have a copy of what was going to happen. And a lot of this got moved around. There's some stuff that's pretty different The "Jungle Moon" [S5E12] reveal used to happen much earlier. Steven was going to get to the palace with the Diamonds in it, and they were going to feel that he was there; the early thought was that the Diamonds were going to be able to feel Pink's presence when Steven was around We knew early on that he was going to have to get closer to them, and he was going to have to connect with them, and they were going to have to figure out who he was. So we knew *what* was going to happen, and *why*, just not the details of how, and we'd all get together and say, "What's the most entertaining way that we can dole out each piece of information?"

Going deeper and deeper into Pearl's pearl was an extremely early idea, from season one! Steven was going to go in there and see everything she had stored and battle a monster in there. We never cracked that story, so it stayed in the backs of our minds. When we got closer to the Rose reveal, we thought, "Yes, we can use this concept to do it!" We already understood how her storage system worked, and it seemed like a great way to explain how deeply she'd buried this. A lot of later episodes in the show came together this way. . . We were able to marry big plot points with episode ideas that had been brewing for years

A lot of these big ideas would also happen at writers' retreats. You can see some of the games we'd play in the first art book [*Art & Origins*]. But later, deeper into the show, we'd do some games to warm up, but then we'd sit down and get serious and say, "All right, we need the story to go here," and we'd workshop how we were going to get there.

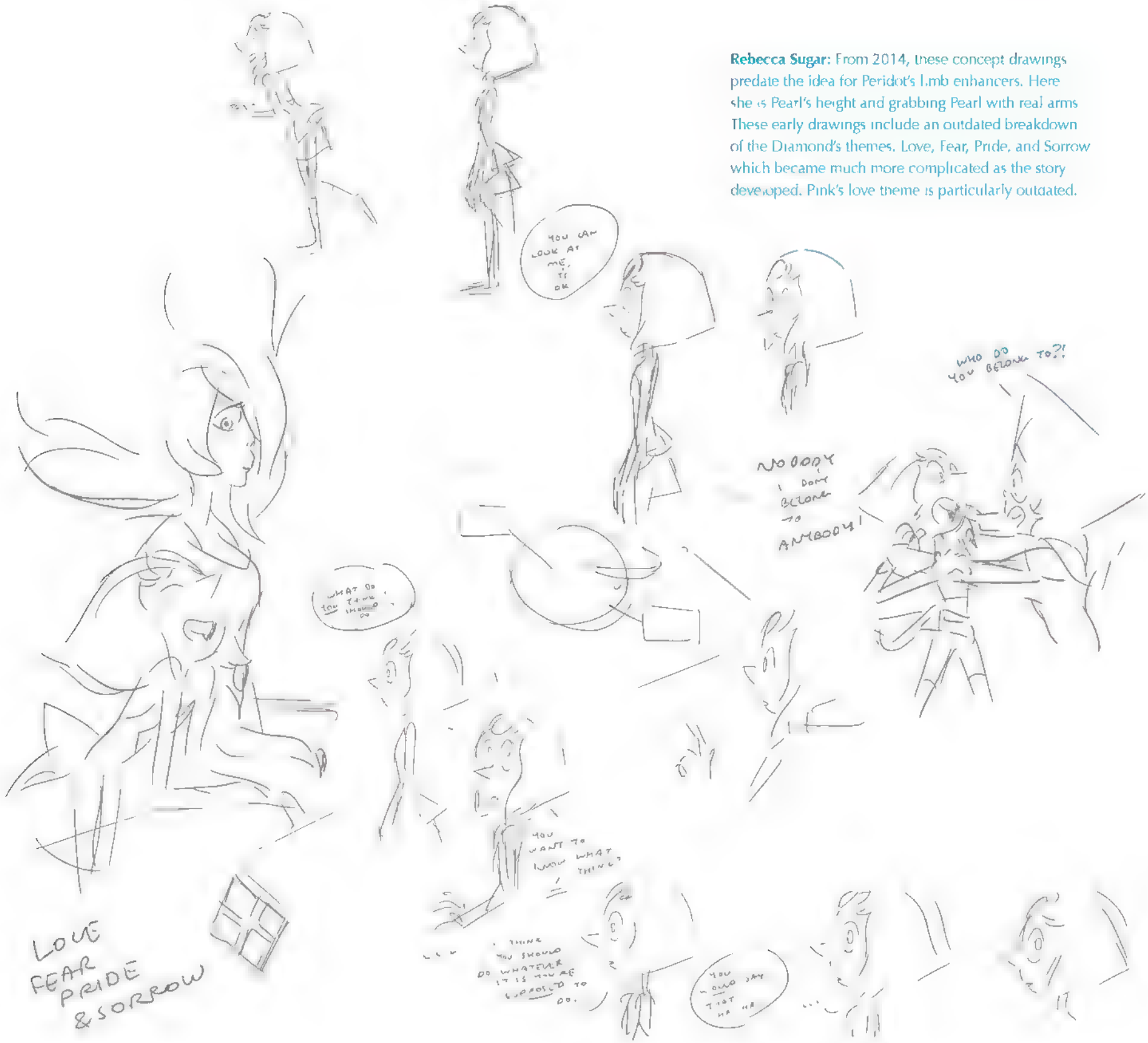
We came up with the orb in the Moon Base at a writers' retreat. Joe [Johnston] drew that into "It Could've Been Great" [S3E2]; he had drawn an orb because it looked cool and said, "We'll figure out what it's for later." And for a year we didn't know what it did yet. Early on we thought, "OK, that will be some sort of communication room where the Diamonds talk to each other, and maybe that's what the orb is — a projector for holographic conference calls." And then at the writers' retreat it hit us that the orb is a *globe*, and you can use it to pinpoint and project what's happening on Earth all around you to see what's going on, which felt so great and made so much sense—everything clicked together and we all got real excited. That gave us the episode "Can't Go Back" [S5E17], and we were also able to use it for "Now We're Only Falling Apart" [S5E19]. That's what I love so much about doing this as a board-driven show. We're dealing in visual ideas, staying flexible enough to keep looking for more elegant and interesting visual solutions at every stage. And through the entire process, I get to trade ideas with artists who I trust and admire.

Rebecca's charts were both useful and potentially dangerous. They existed at the studio in printed and digital forms, and there was always the danger that they could have leaked. What percentage of dedicated *Steven Universe* fans would have had the discipline to avoid looking at them, or even then had the luck to avoid the subsequent spoiler-laden discussion that would have inevitably dominated social media?

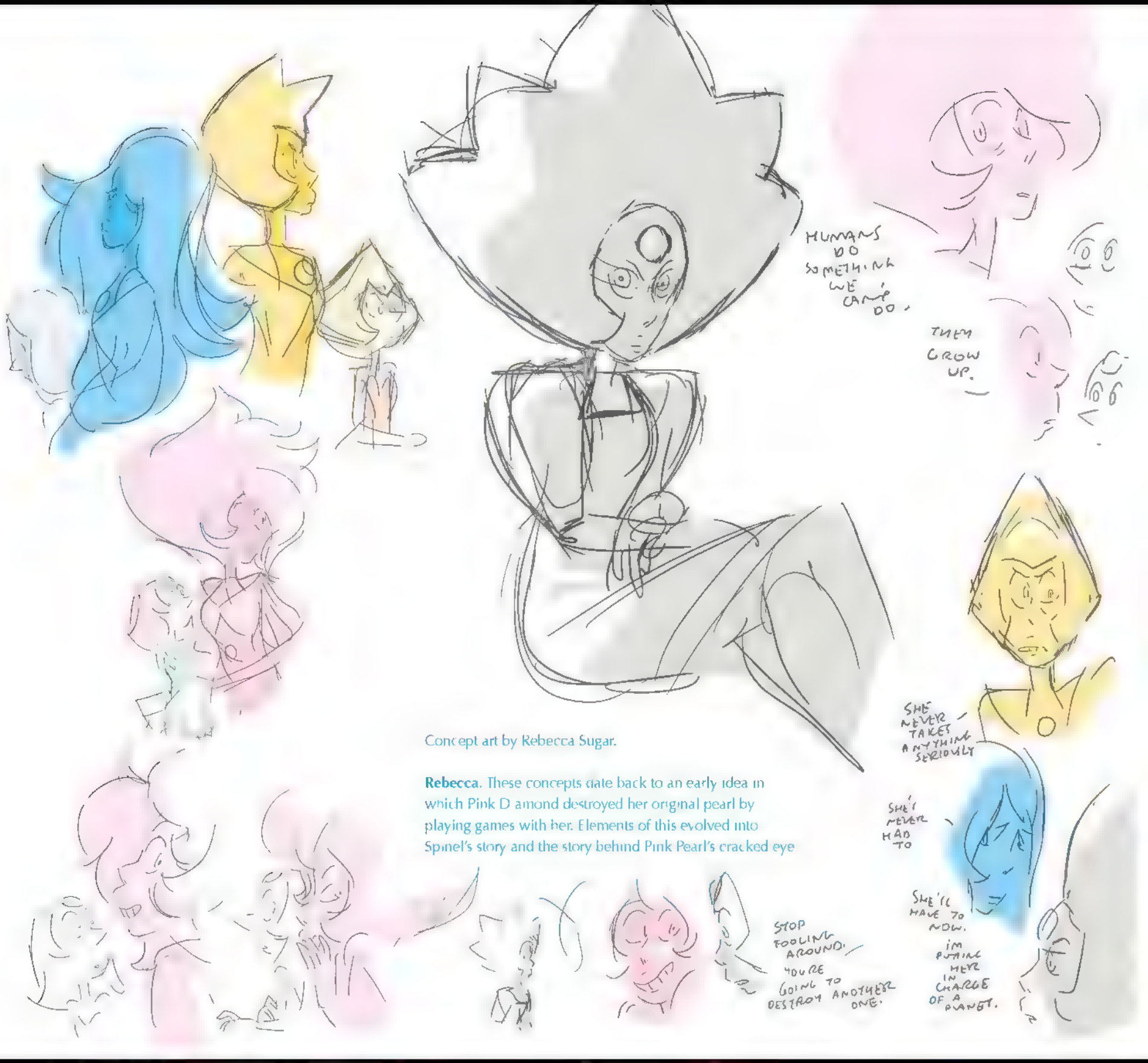
Discipline was a necessary part of the job for the crew. On each person's first day they would be briefed on the entire story of *Steven*, then trusted with the weight of keeping it confidential

Ian: The big twist of the show—the reveal of Rose being Pink Diamond—was one of the first things that was really set in stone about the lore. Storyboarders were told that on their first day. Even *way* back—because we had to explain a lot of things like, "Why is Steven so overpowered? Why is all this stuff happening?"—we would just have to tell the crew, "Oh, he has Pink Diamond's gem so he actually has unlimited power, but he's limited by being a kid so he can't tap into everything yet." They had to know about that from very early on. We chose that, as well as some other things that

(Continued on page 84)


YOU CAN LOOK AT ME, IT IS OK
WHO DO YOU BELONG TO?!
NOBODY I DON'T BELONG TO ANYBODY!
WHAT DO YOU THINK I SHOULD DO
YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I THINK?
I THINK YOU SHOULD DO WHATEVER IT IS YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO DO.
YOU SHOULD SAY THAT TO HER
LOVE
FEAR
PRIDE
&SORROW

Rebecca Sugar: From 2014, these concept drawings predate the idea for Peridot's limb enhancers. Here she is Pearl's height and grabbing Pearl with real arms These early drawings include an outdated breakdown of the Diamond's themes. Love, Fear, Pride, and Sorrow which became much more complicated as the story developed. Pink's love theme is particularly outdated.


HUMANS DO SOMETHING WE CAN'T DO.
THEM
GROW UP.
SHE NEVER TAKES ANYTHING SERIOUSLY
SHE'S NEVER HAD TO
SHE'LL HAVE TO NOW.
IM PUTTING HER IN CHARGE OF A PLANET.
STOP FOOLING AROUND! YOURE GOING TO DESTROY ANOTHER ONE.

Concept art by Rebecca Sugar.

Rebecca. These concepts date back to an early idea in which Pink D amond destroyed her original pearl by playing games with her. Elements of this evolved into Spinel's story and the story behind Pink Pearl's cracked eye

(Continued from page 81)

we were just very assured about, so that we could write the whole mystery and lead up to it as much as possible.

Lauren Hecht [animatic editor]: When I came in to interview for the job of animatic editor, I got to watch the pilot, and I was completely charmed. I saw so many possibilities of what the show might be. At the end of the first season, Rebecca gathered the crew into a conference room and gave us an outline of the major story points. As the years went on I made many guesses about how the story was going to unfold, and every single one of them was wrong

Joe Johnston [supervising director]: My first day, back in 2012, was a whirlwind experience. I hadn't met Rebecca, I hadn't seen the finished pilot—just the animatic and I had no idea about the direction of the show. Rebecca took me through a rough outline of the total story, including bits of the Diamonds and Rose Quartz, but also the concept of fusions, the true nature of the Gems, Garnet's secret components, all these secrets and plans for the future all at once. I was floored I started the last week of December that year, and all I could think while I was on Christmas break was how excited I was to go back to work.

Miki Brewster [storyboard artist]: I remember when I got in, one of the first things Rebecca told me was "Rose Quartz is Pink Diamond," and I was so shocked I just said, "Oh." She also told me that Ruby and Sapphire were going to get married, and I said, "Aren't they already married?!" I was excited for them, though

Drew Green [storyboard artist]: I was fortunate enough to come in some weeks ahead of my start date to watch all the unaired episodes and a rough animatic of the movie. I was left more or less alone in the writers' room, eating free cereal and watching my favorite cartoon for a handful of hours. I felt like the luckiest kid alive!

Big reveals became a much-anticipated feature of the chunky, stop-and-start way the *Steven* episodes were released on Cartoon Network. Debuting in weeklong bursts of daily episodes, these groupings of premieres became known as "Steven-bombs," and fans could expect some substantive new lore with each serving.

Much like Rebecca's charts, keeping those individual big reveals secret was a constant concern Episodes were written, storyboarded, and designed almost a year before they aired, leaving much room for error.

Rebecca: It was just really surreal for us to finally be covering this ground [with the show's central secrets] because we had been talking about it for so many years. I remember that the energy at work was very unusual and tense and excited because we were finally doing it. We had been discussing this forever, trying to figure out how to plant the seeds.

Ian: We put so many clues in. If you were really paying attention, you could have guessed it, and then it would seem so obvious that you'd start to doubt that it was true. Then, right when people were the most doubtful, we hit them with the big reveal it *was* true! That was a nice MO because you don't want people to feel like something came out of nowhere; you want them to feel like they knew it all along, and it seems really obvious in retrospect. You just want to make sure that the timing is right so that when it does hit them, it's at a dramatic juncture

One of the biggest secrets of the series was in fact leaked in error . . . by a pink T-shirt. When an intriguing new item appeared in the online catalog of pop-culture retailer Hot Topic, fans noticed

Rebecca. Whenever a big reveal like Pink Diamond would be on the horizon, we'd all be holding our breaths thinking, like, "Just don't let this get out." I definitely lived in fear for a long time that the

This spread: Pink Diamond's mysterious, obscured appearance was just beginning to be carefully revealed in short scenes like this one where she is contorted with rage in "Jungle Moon," when her clownish, childlike design was prematurely released on a T-shirt.

Pink Diamond reveal would get out there. We were only ever showing Pink Diamond in this negative context: stylized in these story sequences, or contorted with rage like we saw her in "Jungle Moon" [S5E12]. What we were hiding was the clown-like, childish-looking state that she is often in. So that was hidden, but then this T-shirt came out with her model-sheet design on it before the reveal! It had a full-body pose on it. She's smiling, she's got her poof-ball shoes, she's got hair like Steven's hair. People still didn't guess the entirety of the story, but they looked at her and thought, "Oh, she looks like a little clown." Part of me was excited that the design is so clear that you can look at her and immediately tell how she fits in among the hierarchy of the Diamonds, but we had really been trying to obscure that by previously showing her only in scenes where she's depicted in this terrifying position of power. That took the wind out of our sails a little bit, when she showed up on a T-shirt.

There were many instances like this—Ruby's and Sapphire's wedding outfits leaked because of a toy fair, I believe. Clips from unaired episodes would leak with major spoilers, or even be used in official promos, like Peridot handing Lapis a present, when as far as the audience knew, Lapis was still a part of Malachite ("Super Watermelon Island" [S3E5] had yet to air). Or Steven talking with the Diamonds on his porch before their major showdown in "Reunited" [S5E23]. It was very demoralizing for the crew. We'd be on pins and needles, never knowing when something might leak.

In-show visual clues about series secrets were intentionally dropped here and there, even as recurring motifs. The flower imagery throughout suggested a connection among Pink Diamond, Rose Quartz, and Steven.

Rebecca: The symmetries in the designs of the palanquin and Pink's flower—which is a *Hibiscus syriacus*, the South Korean national flower—were intentional. Steven [Sugar] came up with the symmetry of the five-pointed flower and the five-pointed star, which would eventually become the Crystal Gems' logo. Once you start to know Pink a little better, you can see echoes of her through the entire structure of the show. Steven has her hair; he takes after her. The star really links to the five-pointed flower, and all her designs involve the hibiscus, which she rejects when she becomes Rose. We came up with a lot of that imagery as we went—it wasn't all established at the very beginning, but it was working in service of uncovering this connection.

Mary Nash [background designer]. For example, Pink Diamond's hibiscus flower is a major design motif in the Human Zoo.

Steven Sugar [lead background designer]: The Human Zoo was meant to look like it was *of* Homeworld, but with the addition of Pink's fascination with humanity. So it's the one place where we get Gem sculptures of humans, which emphasize one of the most noticeable differences between Gems and humans: ears.

Background art was also embedded with many references that were personally meaningful to the artists.

Steven: The backgrounds are full of stuff that influenced us. There are some shout-outs to *Animal Crossing* in there, to *Zelda*, *Firewatch*, *Dark Souls*, pretty much anything we were playing and enjoying while making the show. For me it often felt less like a nod to the audience and more like putting a little bit of who I was and what I was enjoying at that moment into the show.

Also, the design solution of jigsaw puzzle pieces being worked into Homeworld's architecture was a by-product of us doing jigsaw puzzles at lunch as a crew.

Mary: I included *Mystery Science Theater 3000* references in my backgrounds throughout the show, as well as some of my favorite books in the library displays and cult movie references in Sadie's room.

(Continued on page 88)

DARKEN
FG
ON
OBJECT
WHIPPAN
PAN

(Continued from page 85)

I felt especially connected to Sadie, as I had also been a twentysomething with very specific, weird cult interests living in her mom's basement. It was cathartic in a way.

Another recurring hint that Pearl held a blockbuster secret was seeded in her body language.

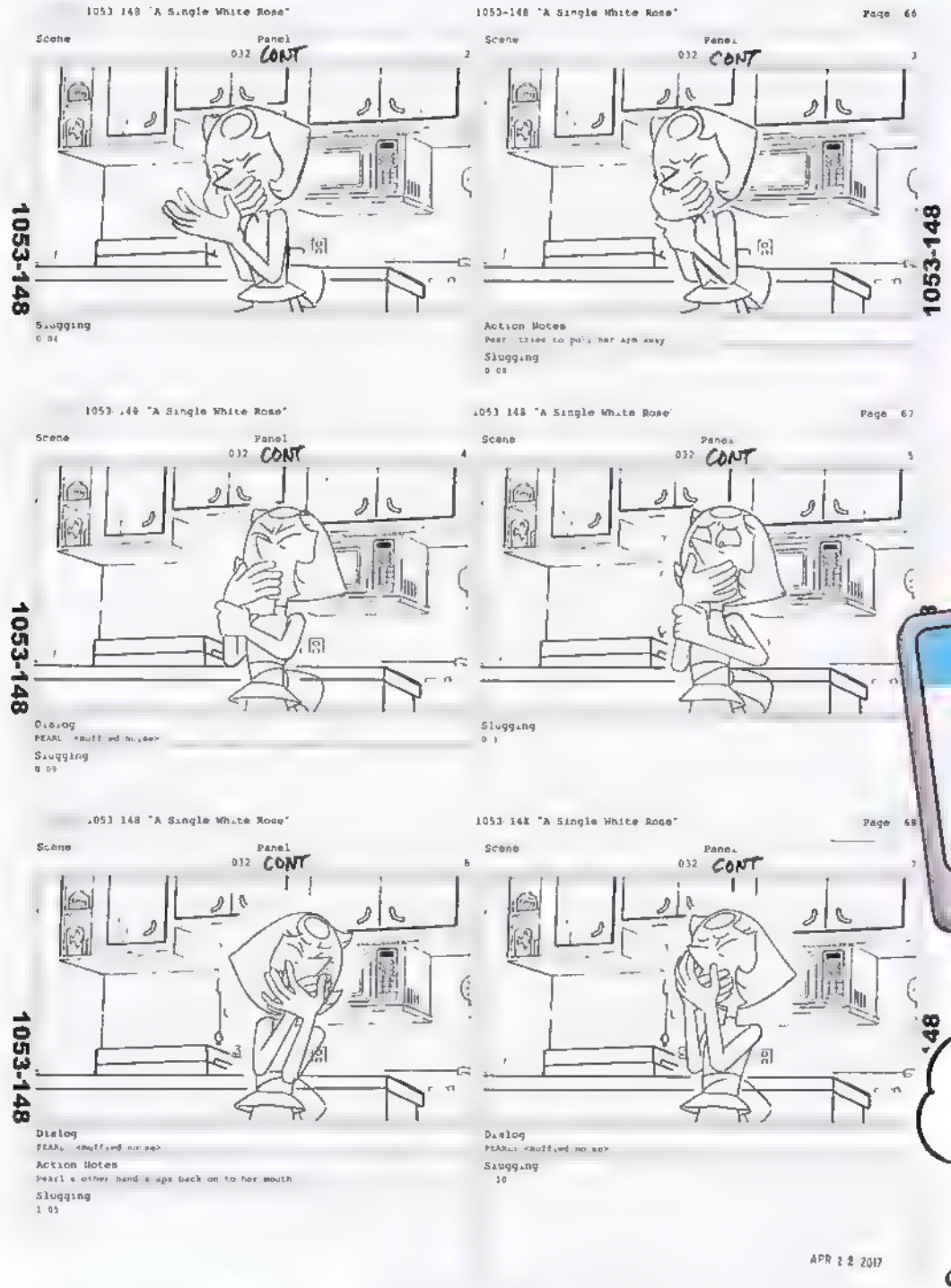
Rebecca: Throughout the series, when Pearl comes close to talking about her past, she talks about it very openly, in generic terms. She talks about not being from Earth and coming to Earth and wanting to save it. She reminisces about her life on Homeworld in a fond way in "Space Race" [S1E28]. She had been amid all this majesty, which she still thinks of more fondly than Rose does. She's not allowed to connect the dots, so when she starts to, her hand reflexively covers her mouth. In "A Single Pale Rose" [S5E18], we establish that it's an involuntary reaction that has been forced upon her, but we see it a ton of times throughout the series. It happens when she makes a hologram of Rose in "Rose's Scabbard" [S1E45]. When she starts to talk about the zoo and she can't elaborate on it, she covers her mouth. When Steven comes to her with Buddy's book and she tries to talk about it, she covers her mouth. The extreme version is in "Gemcation" [S5E6], where you see her actually trying to pry her hand off her mouth and she can't do it—when it starts to become a more obviously involuntary compulsion.

Each new reveal also had the effect of recontextualizing all that had come before. Pink Diamond's reveal changed everything that the audience, and Steven, had thought they knew about his mother, Rose Quartz. Viewers could reexamine the show with new answers even while many questions about Steven's existence remained.

Rebecca: We all felt a lot like the characters in that we could never discuss the big Pink Diamond/Rose Quartz/Steven reveal. I had to find ways in interviews to somehow not talk about this, even though it was really central to why a lot of things were happening in the series. Episodes like "Bismuth" [S3E24] make much more sense when you know that Rose is Pink, and even more sense when you understand how poorly Pink treated friends who became inconvenient. The fact that we were finally going to be able to recontextualize so many already-aired episodes was so exciting. I wanted the re-watch of the show to unlock new layers of story. "Your Mother and Mine" [S5E13] means something very different when it turns out that the stories that Garnet has been telling—which she heard from Rose—were actually an awful portrait Rose was painting of herself and her own terrible behavior. "We Need to Talk" [S2E9] is full of information about how Rose feels about herself, and how desperately she needed someone to challenge her.

Rose is tracked carefully through the entire show. She makes sense once you know she is her own worst enemy. She dreams, achingly, that she could become compassionate, because she's sure she's incapable of compassion. Her lack of respect for herself makes it impossible for her to respect everyone closest to her. She reveres them instead, because they are better than she could ever be, and that reverence is so honest and intoxicating that it draws everyone closer to her, without them understanding the deep self hatred that pull is coming from

Opposite and page 90: Various instances in which Pearl involuntarily covered her mouth when confronted with potentially revealing secrets about Pink Diamond. **Below**: Storyboard drawing by Rebecca Sugar



Art from "A Sing e Pale Rose" (S5E18). Boards by Danny Cragg.

Art by Katie Mitroff.

3: THE HEART OF THE CRYSTAL GEMS

Background art from "Action 3: Straight to Video" (S1E35). Line art by Steven Sugar. Background paint by Amanda Winterstein and Jasmin Lai

Relationships are central to *Steven Universe*, a show in which many of the most epic battles take place in the inner world of the mind.

Besides using his Gem abilities—which he is still discovering by the end of the series—Steven also engages his very human powers of emotional understanding and communication to save Earth many times over. For example, the Cluster, the giant amalgamation of Gem shards in the center of the planet, isn't defeated by Steven so much as it is empathized into cooperation; Steven gains an ally while saving humanity.

Steven Universe's heroes wrestle with emotional connections to one another and also with their relationships to themselves.

Rose Quartz/Pink Diamond is a central instigator in the long arc of the Gems' story. Her emotional revelation on Earth in "The Answer" (S2E22), when she witnesses a fusion—Garnet—for the first time, galvanizes her eventual total rebellion against Homeworld and Gem society. Then there's her intense but short relationship with Greg, and long after she's gone, her outsize influence continues on for Steven and the Crystal Gems, who struggle with her absence. Her character is at the core of *Steven Universe*'s tale.

Rebecca Sugar [series creator]: She couldn't stand herself; self-destruction is a huge theme throughout the show—the struggle of the feeling that you shouldn't exist, and what that can do to a person. A lot of the themes of the show exist within Rose, like her inability to be honest with other people or herself about what she's done. She's so deeply ashamed of herself and her past, with very good reason. The truth is that the people in her life would be so much more understanding than she believes they will be. The contempt that she has for herself gets turned outward as contempt for other people when she can't trust them. When she can't trust herself, she can't trust other people, and it makes it impossible for her to be close with anyone. It makes life extremely difficult for her. It makes *living* difficult for her.

The show is so much about honesty and trust and being able to grow and change. Rose wants all those things so badly, but she can't really accomplish any of that until she accepts herself—and she never does.

The unlikely relationship of Steven's parents—aspirational rock star Greg "Universe" DeMayo and Pink Diamond turned Rose Quartz—was also based partly on this shared rejection of the past.

Rebecca: Rose and Greg have a very specific relationship. They parallel each other: Greg left his unsupportive family to follow his dreams. He changes his name and begins living as his stage persona. . . . He invents himself. And then he meets Rose, his fantasy partner: a stunning magical alien. Rose is instantly interested in Greg; he's so human, sweet and funny and pliable. But as they get a little deeper into their relationship, Greg starts to realize how alien she actually is. She objectifies him, she laughs at him. . . . She can't seem to relate to him or pick up on how he's feeling. They have a physical relationship, but they've never had a meaningful conversation. He starts to feel used. So he challenges her in a way she's never been challenged before: He asks her to treat him like an equal. This is huge for her. She's always been less than the other Diamonds and more than everyone else. She opens up to him in a real way, and over time she's ready to confess everything to him. But he understands what it is to run away from home and reinvent yourself. He doesn't need her old name and he's not going to drag her through whatever it was she ran from; as far as he's concerned, her old self isn't the real her anyway. The real her is her in the present, the person she decided to be. [Greg tells Steven about this interaction in "Steven's Dream" (S4E10).] This is an incredible relief for her! With him, she can live authentically in the moment. . . . They both can, but on the flip side, they enable each other. She never unpacks what scares her about her past, and neither does he.

In an incredible act of sacrifice, Rose and Greg decide to create a child, who turns out to be Steven.

Rebecca. Greg's a really loving person who Rose knew would be an amazing parent. They really wanted to have a child. We talk a lot about that in "Greg the Babysitter" [S3E20]. It's something they are genuinely excited about. And that's something that's left a little open-ended—just how selfish it was for Rose to do this knowing that she would disappear. What Rose is doing is outrageously selfless and outrageously selfish at the same time, and you can really read it both ways and neither is untrue. The thing that she really lacks is balance, any ability to temper her extremes. This is part of her character throughout her forms: She's always very extreme.

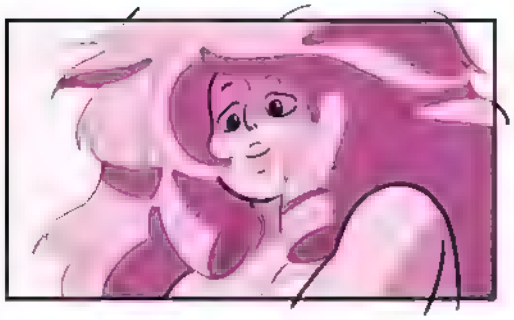
A theme in the show is the eventual swing from an extreme position or state of being to the polar opposite, inspired by the writing of psychiatrist Carl Jung.

Rebecca. The stuff I really like from Jung is enantiodromia—that any extreme will inevitably produce the opposite of that extreme. Whoever you think you are, the more sure you are of it, the more certain it is that you are probably the opposite of the thing that you think you are. That's true for White Diamond: She is so sure she's right that she's actually profoundly wrong. Yellow Diamond is so sure that she is strong that she's actually profoundly weak. Blue Diamond is so sure that she's sensitive that she's actually profoundly insensitive. And then Pink Diamond is so sure that she's powerless, but she's actually profoundly powerful, so much so that she devastates people's lives without understanding it because she thinks that she has no real power or sway.

The series' novel, sci-fi conceit of fusion is a central way that the creative team talks about relationships, as fusion creates one being out of two or more, personifying the relationship itself in the form of an entirely new character. These fusions (discussed in *Art & Origins*) can include positive and negative relationships—sibling, friendly, romantic, collaborative, goal-based, and more.

In typical *Steven* fashion, Rebecca and the crew set out to explore the emotional reality of what it might be like to live a practically permanently fused existence, and how the component Gems may navigate what is essentially a committed love story, in human terms. The fusion in question is, of course, Garnet, the stoic, powerful leader of the Crystal Gems, who is a fusion of Ruby and Sapphire.

Drawings by Rebecca Sugar, and notes from a Rose model sheet



Rebecca: I was thinking about long-term relationships with Ruby and Sapphire because Garnet has been together for 5,750 years. [*Laughs.*]

"Differentiation" between two individuals in a committed relationship is the idea that by maintaining and strengthening individuality, the relationship itself becomes stronger—with the wider implications being that losing one's self in another person entirely is not a recipe for long term success, and that taking the time to strengthen individual integrity leads to better relations. Interestingly, "fusion" is a term that's used by researchers of human psychology (citing Dr. Murray Bowen's *theory*) to indicate a lack of differentiation—the total loss of a person's individuality in a relationship (which is not a good thing in this context).

In the series, differentiation suddenly comes into play when Garnet learns of Rose's treachery for the first time and feels so betrayed and upset that she un fuses into Ruby and Sapphire. After Ruby storms off and the two are separated by time and physical distance, it becomes clear that they have some individual work to do on themselves. Ruby goes on a Wild West cowboy camping adventure and realizes, with Steven and Amethyst's help, that she still wants to be with Sapphire—but she wants it to be their choice, not because they were told that they were "the answer" so many years ago by Rose. So they return home, and Ruby proposes to Sapphire.

Rebecca: The episode "The Question" [S5E21], where Steven and Ruby are out in the wilderness together, is based on a real trip. I went out to Joshua Tree with my brother and I accidentally drove us over a ridge and got us stuck in the desert—and it was horrible! There's a scene in the episode where Ruby accidentally runs off a cliff, which is a one-to-one, basically, of me driving us off a cliff. [*Laughs.*] It was my twenty-ninth birthday.

And this is the thing about Ruby: I've never really lived alone, and there is a part of me that wonders if I could do it. And even going out to the desert with my brother was a bit of a test: "Oh, I wonder if I can be on my own"—and ironically not really on my own because I'm there with my brother but—"be on my own for a little bit." The episode used to be called "No Ruby Is an Island." With her, I was just excited to talk about that: As a ruby she was always with other rubies, and the only point where she wasn't with other rubies was when she went off with Sapphire. So I wanted to talk about the anxiety that comes with going from being with your family to being with your significant other and really having nothing in between—have you had enough time to develop yourself as a person yet? But that's not something you have to be alone to do. There are so many ways to do that within your relationship.

Ruby and Sapphire's reunification, when they joyfully fuse into Garnet again, happens on their wedding day, attended by their closest friends in Beach City.

Rebecca: The concepts for Ruby and Sapphire's wedding go way back. I was drawing these wedding concepts of them in 2016; some even go back to 2014. We always knew we wanted to have Sapphire in a tux and Ruby in a dress, even before we knew we were doing a wedding, and we had tons of doodles of this. In 2016 I went to my friend's wedding in Taiwan, and these massive hydrangea flowers that she had in her hair made an impression. I remember writing her and asking if it was OK if I put the flowers from her wedding in Ruby's hair.

This wedding story took years to become a reality. Initially, when we introduced Ruby and Sapphire in "Jail Break" [S1E49], we were told they could not be in a romantic relationship. I was told by Cartoon Network's Standards and Practices that they could not kiss on the mouth. When I was asked internally by my executive at the time if they were a couple, I said absolutely, yes—of course—they sing an entire song about how they're in love! I wanted them to be an absolutely iconic cartoon couple,

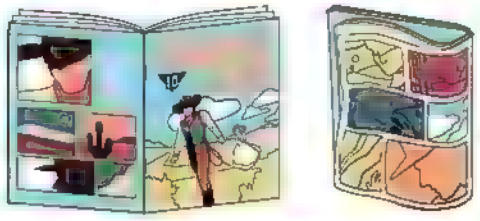
(Continued on page 102)

Background art from "Now We're Only Falling Apart" (S5E19)
Line art by Jane Bak. Background paint by Patrick Bryson

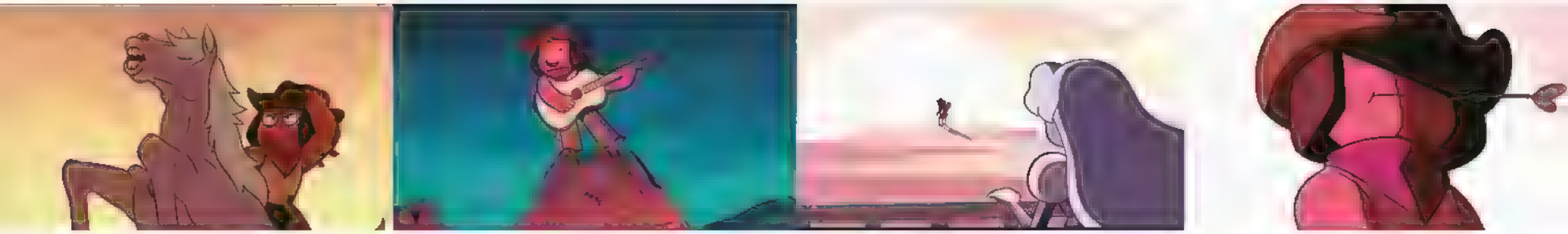
Background art from "The Question" Sol 15, Line art by Steven Seagle, Background art by Patrick Bryson

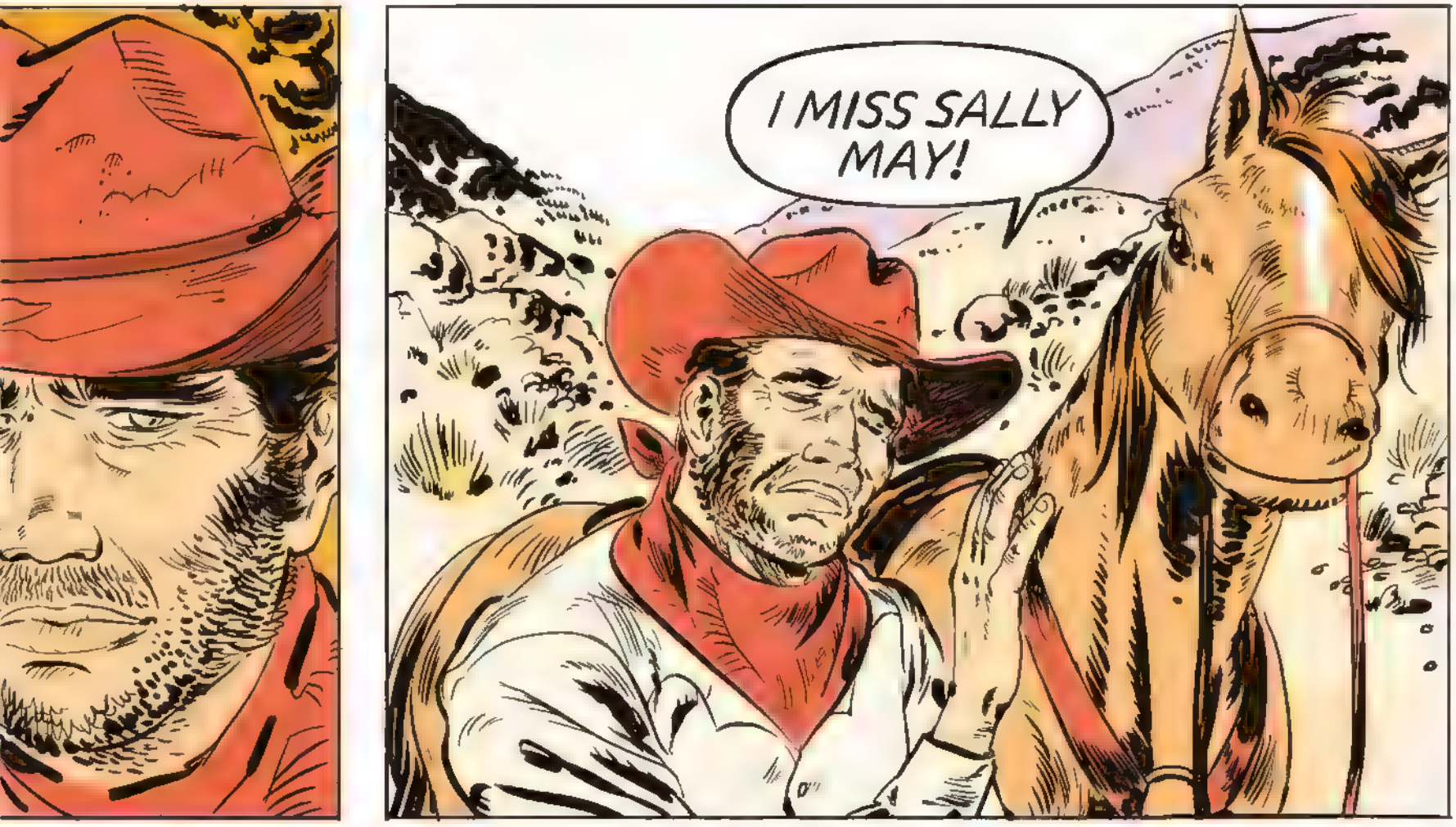
"The Question"

In "The Question" (S5E21), Ruby is inspired by the *Lonesome Lasso* comic book to propose to Sapphire. Lonesome Lasso prop illustrations by Angie Wang. Also below are special pose models of Amethyst as a horse; final design by Colin Howard.



HERE I AM, ON THE OPEN RANGE...
AT LEAST YOU UNDERSTAND ME, HORSEY
GEM LAYERED ON TOP OF GLOW AND MODEL
Glow
Layer this shape on top and set to "Blend Mode Linear Dodge"
BLEND MODE LINEAR DODGE
MODEL WITHOUT GLOW FOR REFERENCE




I MISS SALLY MAY!

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU KNOW HOW TO GET TO CALIFARMLAND, DO YA?

(Continued from page 97)

the queer, interracial, gender-expansive answer to Mickey and Minnie Mouse. But this was 2014, and same-sex marriage was not yet legal in the United States. There was a huge stigma against LGBTQIA+ content in children's media.

Once "Jail Break" came out, our audience picked up on what we were doing with Ruby and Sapphire, not to mention Pearl's obvious love for Rose, but we could not confirm these relationships publicly. Cartoon Network needed the show to work internationally (most animated media for children is designed with an international audience in mind), so we were being held to the standards of the most conservative countries in the world. If they so much as read an interview with me online, the show could lose its international support, and we'd be finished. Even though I couldn't answer, at every public appearance, people would ask me how on Earth I was managing to get these stories on TV, usually in the form of "How are you getting *away* with this?"

I wanted everything for Ruby and Sapphire, every genre of romantic story. Their romantic reunion, a dramatic fight episode, their romantic fairy-tale origin story, the rom-com baseball episode—it only made sense to top it all off with a big animated wedding, so we pitched the first version of the wedding in 2015. It was called "If You Love Yourself So Much," and at that point it was only one episode, about Garnet marrying herself. I was told at the time that "International S&P may object to some of the more direct language about Garnet as a committed relationship, so we may need to be more subtle when approaching her identity through the lens of a wedding."

But I didn't want to be subtle anymore. After suggestions of changing it to some sort of Gem celebration, I put the story on hold to try to figure out how to do it in a more direct way. Then, in June 2016, Ian [Jones-Quartey] proposed to me! Garnet had always been based on our relationship, so that was it. It wasn't going to be honest now, if Ruby and Sapphire didn't get married.

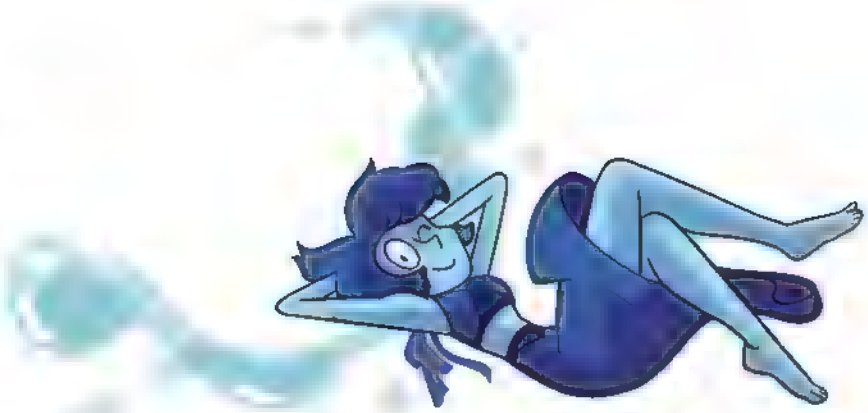
We decided it would be an inexorable part of the story. And then the back-and-forth started, and no one wanted to say the real concerns, so instead it was "Will this appeal to our demographic of six-to-eleven-year-old boys?" But *Ben 10* had an alien wedding, *Powerpuff Girls* had a wedding, there was no question that the Cartoon Network audience would definitely watch a wedding. Arguments were made that it was "out of character" for Steven to want a wedding, but we'd covered our bases there with the episode "Open Book" [S1E51], which had already aired ages ago. It's old news that Steven *loves* weddings. I wouldn't bend on the story, and every time there was a concern about it not being entertaining enough, I would add more: A big musical number! A huge fight! A half-hour special! This thing will be so entertaining it'll blow kids' hair back!

"But if *Steven Universe* gets a gay wedding, then every show is going to want a gay wedding!" "YES!" I said. "GOOD! WHY NOT???"

Eventually the decision came down from on high: We could have the wedding. I knew that was an extremely difficult call to make, and that we were going to be censored heavily and pulled in many countries because of it. And we didn't know at that time if this would mean the end of the show. It looked as if the writing was on the wall, and we were working toward the end.

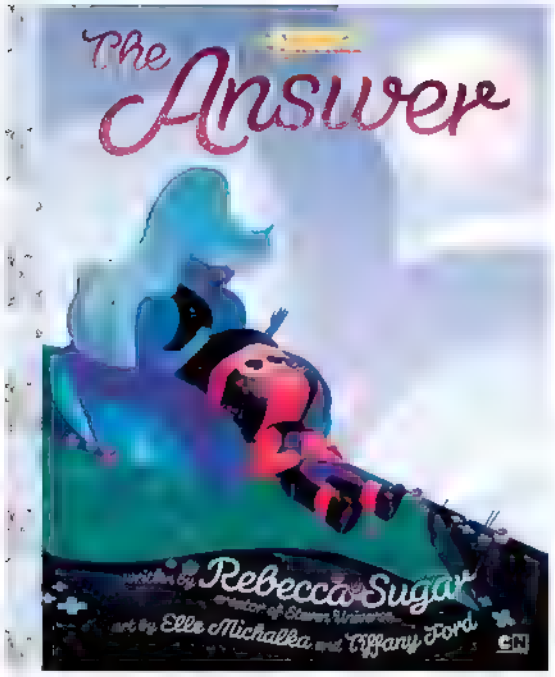
I had been told this would be the final pickup for us, and I campaigned for an additional six episodes on the end of the season in order to wrap up the story—this became the Era 3 arc.

Navigating a cosmos of relationships was a lot for a young person like Steven as he attempted to find the good in everyone and hook that connection that would allow positive change to blossom in the minds of others. His powers were going to be put to the test in so many more ways as the series moved through this slate of episodes, building steam toward an interplanetary conflict.



Opposite: Stills from "The Question."
This page: The rough and final versions of Rebecca's signing card. Ruby and Sapphire's dance (above), was censored and the final version with Garnet holding both of them was used. Final inks by Danny Hynes.

Rebecca Sugar: If you'd like a sense of how extreme the notes were, this drawing of Ruby and Sapphire dancing for the 2015 San Diego Comic-Con signing card was flagged as "too romantic." I was told that people at Cartoon Network, who were otherwise unaware of the characters, might see it and become upset about what we were doing with the show. Because this was just a signing card and not the show itself, this is the one note I'd didn't fight.



Rebecca Sugar. After the publication of *The Answer* in 2016, I was pulled into a meeting and asked to explain myself. I had been told to play down this relationship, and now it existed as a book. In every meeting like this, I would defend our stories and our audience of queer youth – they deserve cartoons and picture books, too. I would leave these meetings feeling rattled. I drew this self portrait the night of *The Answer* book meeting.

Ruby and Sapphire's wedding concept art by Rebecca Sugar

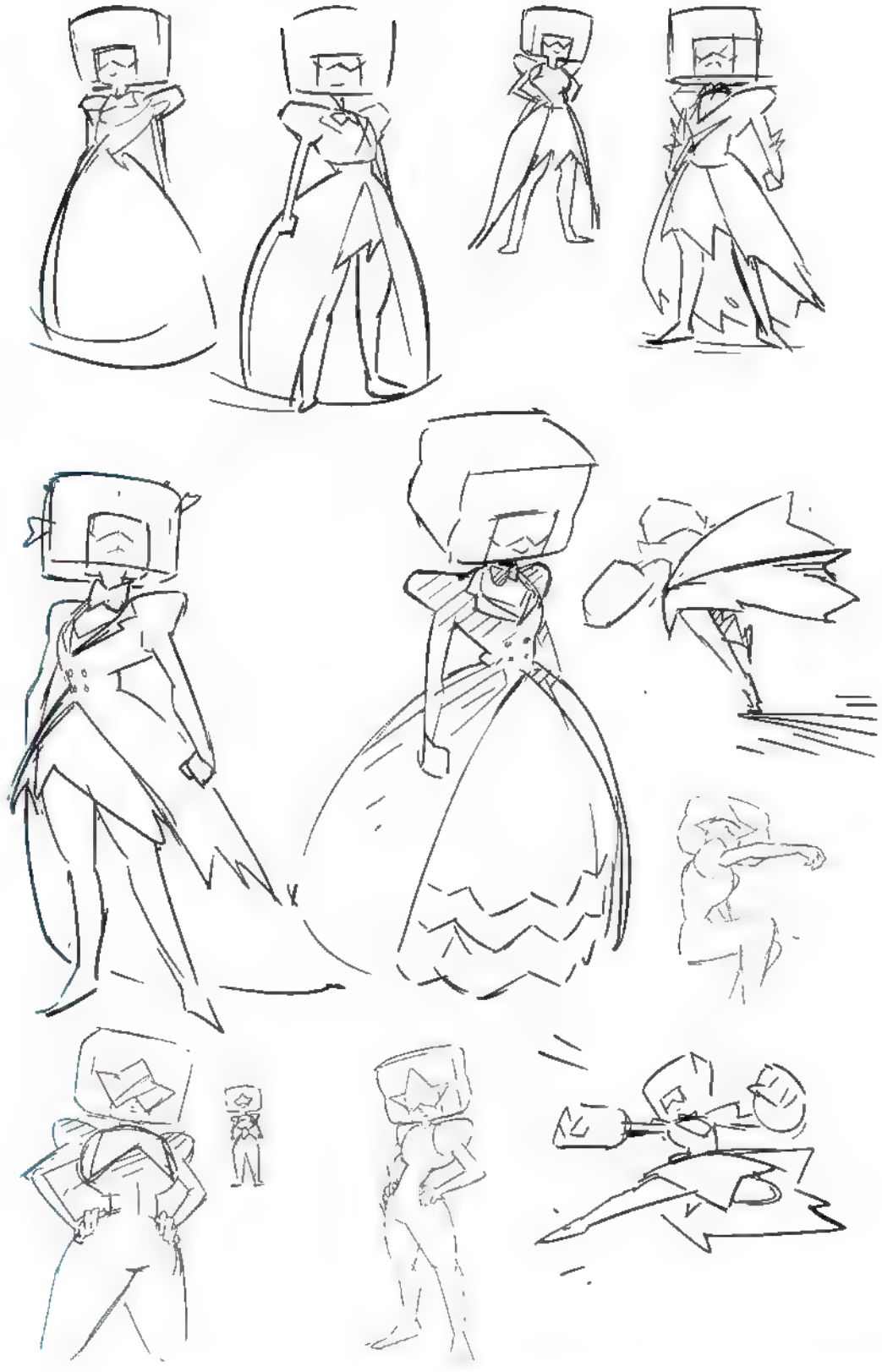
The Wedding

Story board and finished artwork from "Restored" Steven Universe Story board art by Rebecca Sugar Final designs by Ali Ih Right Stamp design by Angie Wang Production and character design by Rebecca Sugar Right Stamp design by Rebecca Sugar

The Leader

Relationships among the main characters were always a point of discussion behind the scenes. A recurring scenario required Rebecca to police Cartoon Network marketing copy to prevent anything from being pushed out that might indicate Steven was the "leader" of the Crystal Gems.

Rebecca Sugar: Throughout the show, CN has always pressured us to make it clear that Steven is the leader of the Crystal Gems, which he is not. Garnet is the leader of the Crystal Gems. But, in order to do the wedding in "Reunited" [S5E23] and the episodes leading up to the wedding, the trade-off that was happening was "Well, as long as you're establishing that Steven is the leader of the Crystal Gems, then maybe we can get this to happen." They've always wanted Steven to be the leader. So the series of episodes that make up *The Heart of the Crystal Gems* was me coming back at that and saying, "Well, Steven is the heart of the Crystal Gems—he's not the leader," to address that note but also to clarify this in general. Steven does end up taking charge, but only because Garnet isn't present. There's a scene in "Made of Honor" [S5E22] that's designed to spell this out, where Bismuth tells Steven he's the leader of the Crystal Gems and Steven says, "I'm not, Garnet is," and Bismuth says, essentially, "Well, Garnet doesn't exist right now, so you're in charge." Which makes Steven realize that he's been taking over for her in her absence. And once Garnet exists again—just throwing this out there for everyone forever—she's the leader of the Crystal Gems. [*Laughs.*]



Opposite: Stills from "Reunited." **This page:** Garnet sketches by Miki Brewster

4: ERA 3

Background art from "Legs from Here to Homeworld" (S5E24). Line art by Steven Sugar and Jane Bak. Background paint by Patrick Bryson, Charles Hilton, and Jasmin Lai.

Under the Great Diamond Authority, every Gem serves the Diamonds' whims, and every Gem has preordained purposes that are determined by their Gem type. On the surface, the Diamonds' control over Homeworld and the Gem diaspora is that of a repressive, authoritarian state, but as the story progresses they're revealed to be Steven's family—a profoundly dysfunctional family perpetuating a cycle of abuse that originates from White Diamond.

Rebecca Sugar [series creator]: Homeworld is a place with no humanity. Gems are treated like objects and tools. While there are examples on Earth of humans dehumanizing each other, Homeworld isn't comparable—Gems don't see themselves as human to begin with. This is why Steven is able to create such massive change: He opens their eyes to the concept of humanity.

The four Diamonds have their own hierarchy, with White as the ultimate power, Yellow and Blue sharing second-tier status, and Pink at the bottom. The arrangement of their icons in the Diamond Authority logo reflects these positions, as do their individual ships, each built as part of a whole humanoid body: White with the head and torso, Blue and Yellow with an arm each, and Pink with the pelvis and legs.

As the series crescendoed toward its climactic battle set on Homeworld, Rebecca created another diagram with notes to keep the Diamonds' behavior anchored by their personalities and positions in the hierarchy.

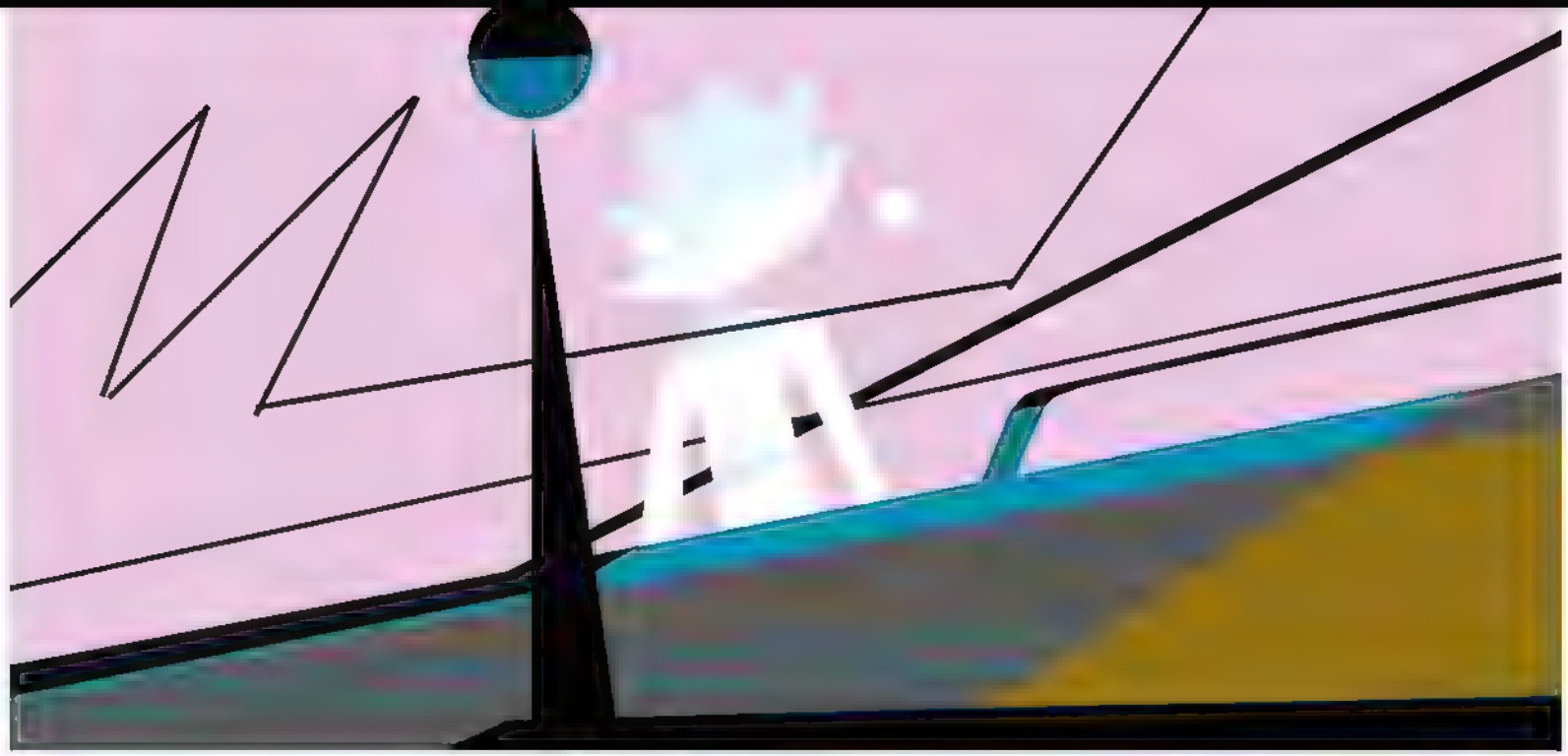
Rebecca: Ultimately, the show is about family. Steven's loving, supportive family, the Crystal Gems, in contrast to the Diamonds. The Diamonds are essentially parents—the Gems that serve them were created by them and are being held to their impossible standards. They're the older generation, modeled after cartoon tropes from older generations: evil stepmother, evil stepsisters . . . Evil Queen, Snow Queen . . . even a little Marvin the Martian. Pink fits into those older tropes, too: the restless princess, the little Winsor McCay clown. But Steven is a new cartoon, and the Diamonds don't know what to make of him.

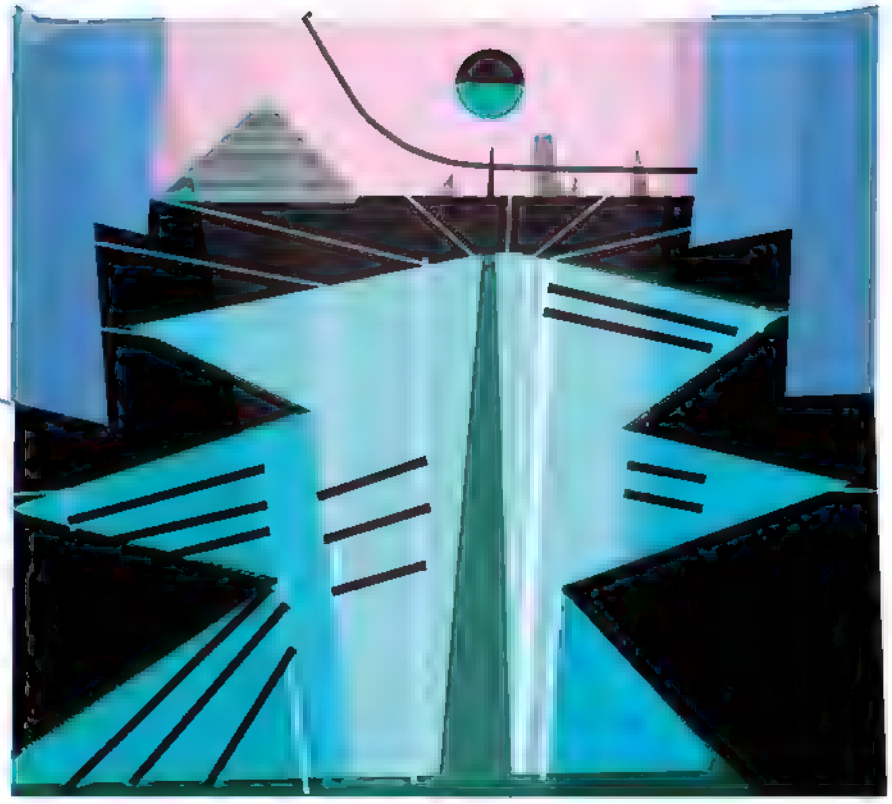
"Change Your Mind" [S5E28] is one body's experience of embarrassment. The Diamonds come together to form one body, and they need each other.

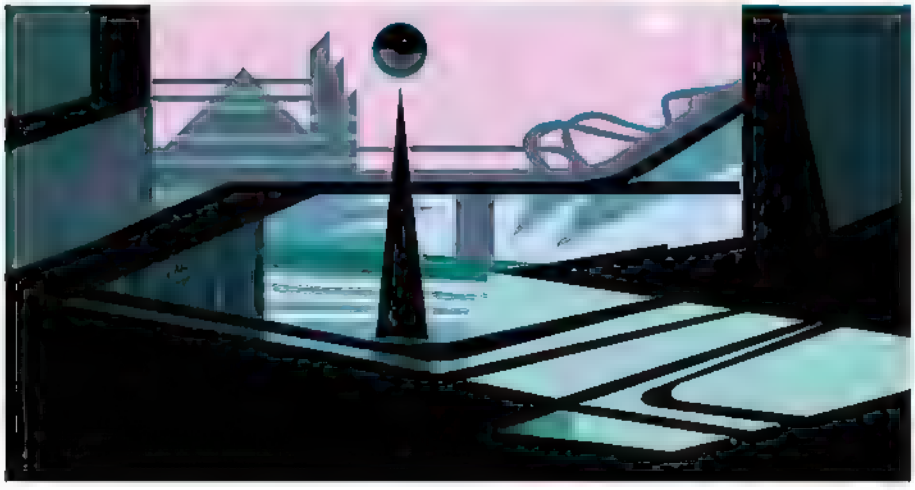
Yellow is physicality, action, force—her power can manipulate Gems physically.

Blue is emotion, thought, culture—her power can manipulate Gems emotionally.

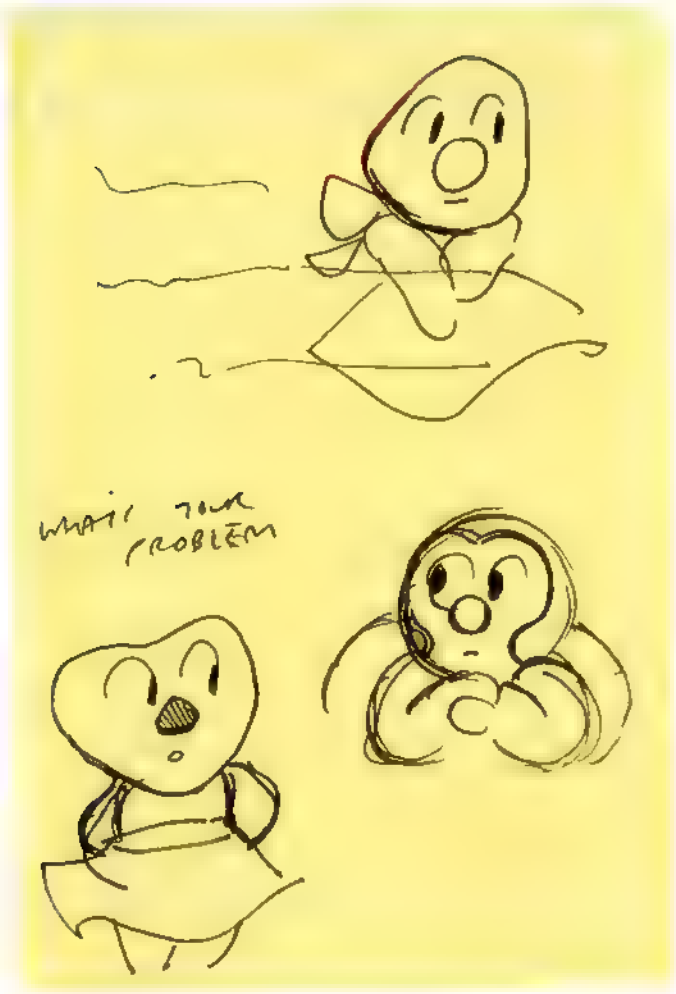
(Continued on page 116)



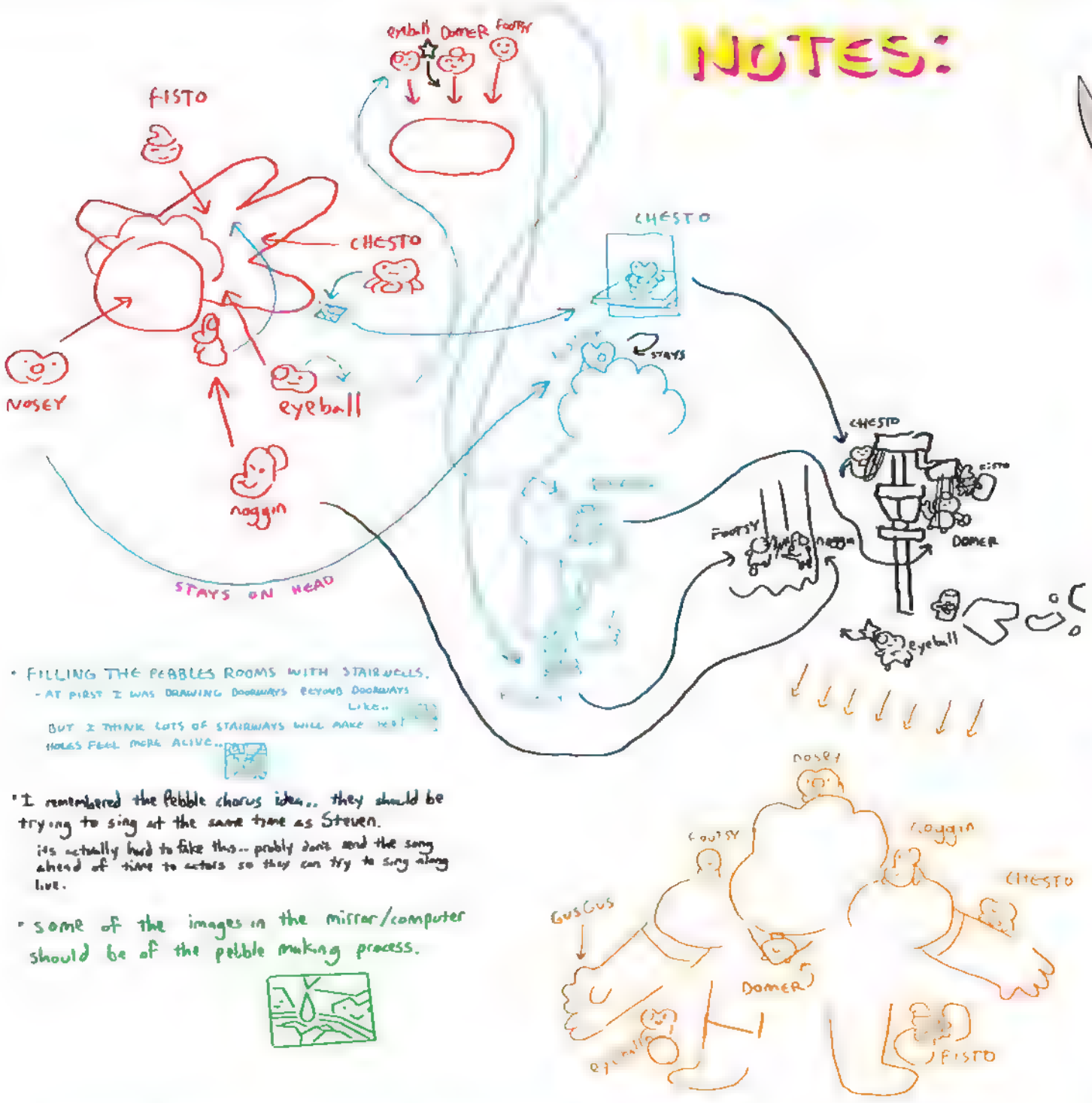




Pebbles


WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM

nosey
eyeball
chesto
noggin
brainy
Footy
Fisto



The Pebbles were part of the fairy tale princess story tropes that Steven experienced in the Era 3 episodes. **Opposite top.** Sketches by Rebecca Sugar. **Above and opposite bottom.** Pebbles concept art by *Adventure Time* creator Pen Ward. **Far right.** Pebbles final design by Aveth Romanikos

(Continued from page 111)

White is identity, judgment, perfectionism, the superego—her power can manipulate, and remove, a Gem's identity.

And Pink is pure *want*. Impulse, desire—she's infectious. She is the flip side of White; she can bring out a Gem's hidden personality—their deepest wants. This isn't necessarily a Diamond power (she has a handful of Diamond powers both destructive and constructive), but she has this power in a very human sense. She is an enabler and very manipulative when it comes to getting what she wants, so when what she wants is to get closer to someone, her intensity, and her sincerity, opens them up and draws them in.

White and Pink were always clashing. The Diamond body repressed Pink's wants, as directed by White, the self-critical conscience. Pink's shield made it impossible for White to override Pink's identity, so she had to find other ways to repress her.

When Steven shows up, White, Yellow, and Blue fall back into a familiar pattern. Pink is here, with a new thing she wants, and they think she's more unreasonable and dangerous to the status quo than ever. What they don't understand is that Steven isn't Pink. He's bringing humanity into the equation. He's trying to introduce it—himself—to them, and they can't even begin to understand him. What he wants (in addition to helping the Gems on Earth) is to just be treated like a person. This is not unreasonable or impulsive, but the Diamond body keeps punishing itself like it always has, for wanting something that White has deemed inappropriate.

Steven has to slowly work his way up to the toxic identity of the Diamonds, personified by White. He can change how Blue feels and what Yellow does, but ultimately, he needs to upend White's authority and change her identity. As long as White asserts herself as the standard for all Gems, any Gem that challenges her idea of herself will be in danger.

White believes that because her Gem channels white light, she is essentially a Gem light-form all the time. All Gems are made of light, and she is light manifest. She sees all Gems as her, sees herself in all Gems, and judges them as she would judge herself. She believes she is everyone—which is why she speaks for everyone. But the truth behind her identity powers is that she has no identity at all. She needs other Gems to behave as she would—she is very poorly differentiated. And any Gem's behavior can be construed by her as a personal attack if they are not behaving as she would. Her identity is so fragile that she can only judge: If she were to act or feel or want, she would open herself up to her own criticism. She has traded that chance to be *someone* for the power of being *everyone*, a decision so miserable that everyone on the planet has to suffer for it.

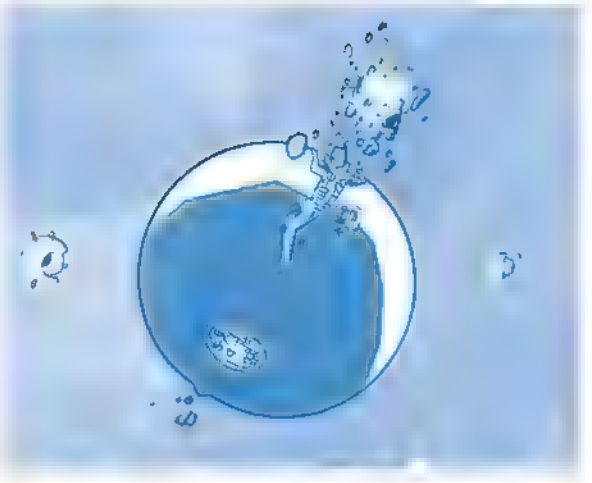
A flash point happens at the ball that Steven throws (in Pink's stead): Connie and Steven dance, accidentally fusing in front of everyone.

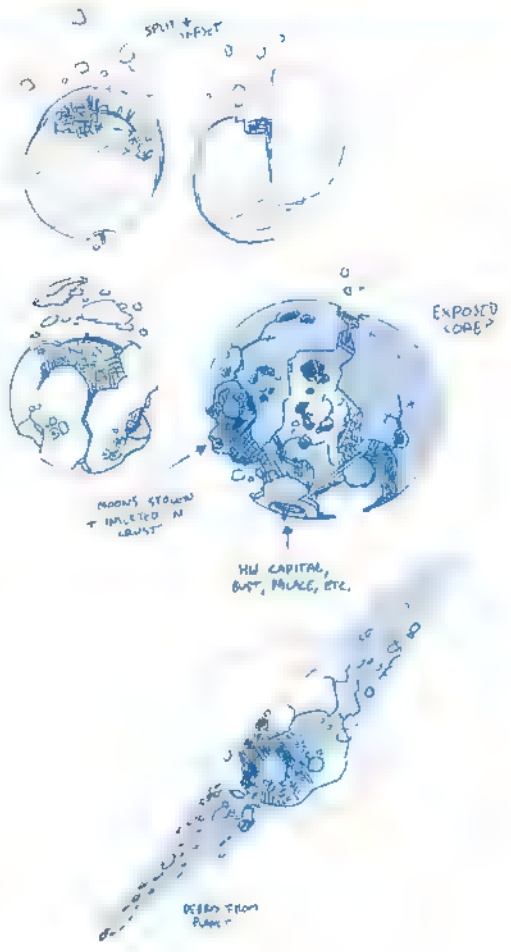
Rebecca: At the ball, Steven and Connie fuse, and the Diamonds see this as another impulsive, irresponsible move from Pink. They see the effect this has on other Gems, that it opens them up to want things for themselves, and to express themselves freely. So Blue and Yellow jump to do what they've always done: repress Pink and her influence, fast enough to avoid judgment from White.

So Yellow takes action and locks Steven in the tower, and Blue comes in to guilt Steven for what he's done, but the old pattern doesn't work on Steven, because he knows he didn't do anything wrong. And he can't be manipulated—in a technical sense, being half-human helps him resist their powers, but also in the sense that he knows he doesn't deserve to be treated like this. He's so secure in the way he feels and the way he acts, which allows him to stand up for himself against Blue and Yellow.

But Steven isn't solid in his identity when he starts to confront White. So he's very vulnerable to what she represents. And up until she pulls out his gem, he has no way to prove that he truly is himself . . . and she's able to target his doubts about it.

The foundation of the show is the idea that simple human truths can be more astonishing and beautiful and powerful than fantasy. We wanted to





THE SUPER EGO
THE
EGO
THE ID
YOU CANT JUST DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
THE ID RETURNS
(SEE WHERE IT GOT YOU?)
THE BODY SCRAMBLES TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO!
AHH!
AHH!
DONT DO THE THINGS YOURE NOT SUPPOSED TO DO.
DONT ACT ON IT!
THE SPOKE TO YOU? IS IT OK? THINGS GO BACK TO NORMAL? JUST GO JUST LIVE ALL LIKE IT DIDNT HAPPEN!
DON'T FEEL IT!
DON'T FEEL THINGS YOURE NOT SUPPOSED TO FEEL!
THE BALL—
THE ID ACTS OUT!!!
EVERYONE WANTS THINGS! IS IT REALLY WRONG??
THE EGO—ACTION
QUICK DO SOMETHING HIDE THIS SUPRESS— AVOID JUDGEMENT!
LOCK IN TOWER
THE EGO—EMOTION
THIS FELT RIGHT MAYBE EVERYONE ELSE IS WRONG
FORCES FROM TOWER.
EGO
EGO
LET THE ID DO WHAT IT WANTS!
SUPER EGO
NO!
TOTAL SHUT DOWN
SUPER EGO—RECOGNIZE THE NEEDS OF THE ID.
ALL 4 THOUGHTFULLY ACT AS A UNIT.
A BODY DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

Opposite. Concept art by Steven Sugar. **Right.** One of Rebecca's charts created to help keep the Diamonds' traits forefront in her mind while writing.

build to this moment where Steven being Steven was the ultimate reveal. The power of him being himself, the simple fact that he actually, definitely exists, obliterates White's authority and her identity—because if she is everyone and everyone is her, then her wrongness about him is a wrongness about herself and everyone and everything. Ultimately, her identity is so fragile, and she's so poorly differentiated, that Steven is able to defeat her by existing.

The conceptual development of Homeworld's backgrounds and architecture was also essential to this extended visit. Steven encountered Gem structures and ships previously, but he has never been so close to the Diamonds' palatial stronghold. Though we, along with Steven, get to see only a selection of essential areas in the Homeworld state, those selections include a spectrum of experiences: from the abandoned Kindergarten of the Off Colors to the Diamonds' personal spas to the grand ballroom to the prison tower.

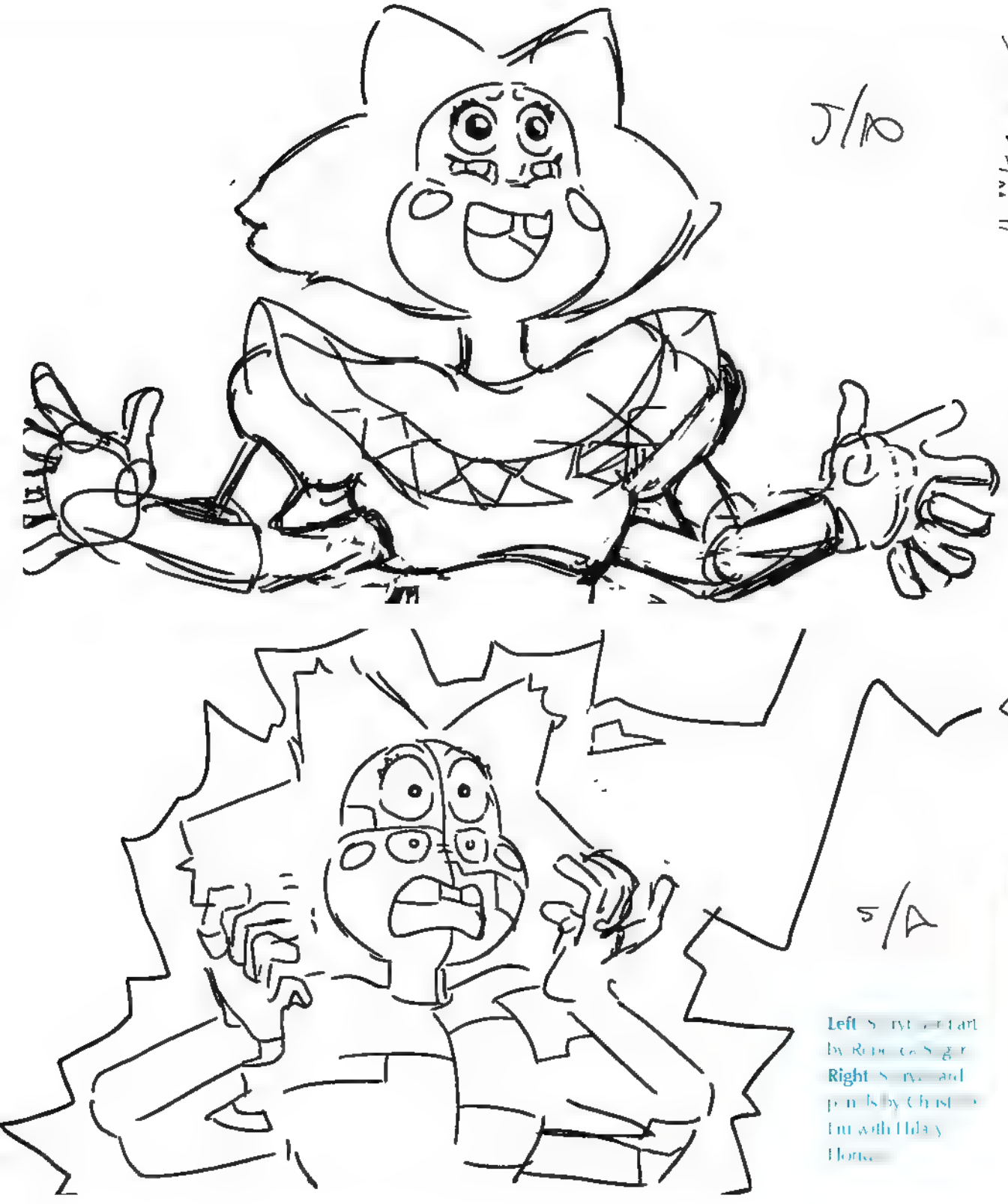
Steven Sugar [lead background designer]: The function of Gem architecture was the biggest problem we had to figure out when going to Homeworld—what does a metropolis look like in a society where there are no human needs? Gems don't eat or sleep or get to particularly enjoy things. There wouldn't be apartments or restaurants or hospitals or schools. We arrived at the idea that Homeworld is built entirely for Gem transport, storage, and role fulfillment. Tubes constantly move Gems from place to place, storing them in buildings for later use or bringing them somewhere to make an appearance and play out their role.

It also needed to be distinctly nonhuman on every level. No roads, no telephone poles, no billboards, no signs. These are human things that meet human needs, and Homeworld Gems don't have those needs, and we needed to show that. It had to feel alien in the entirety of how its design would function.

(Continued on page 122)

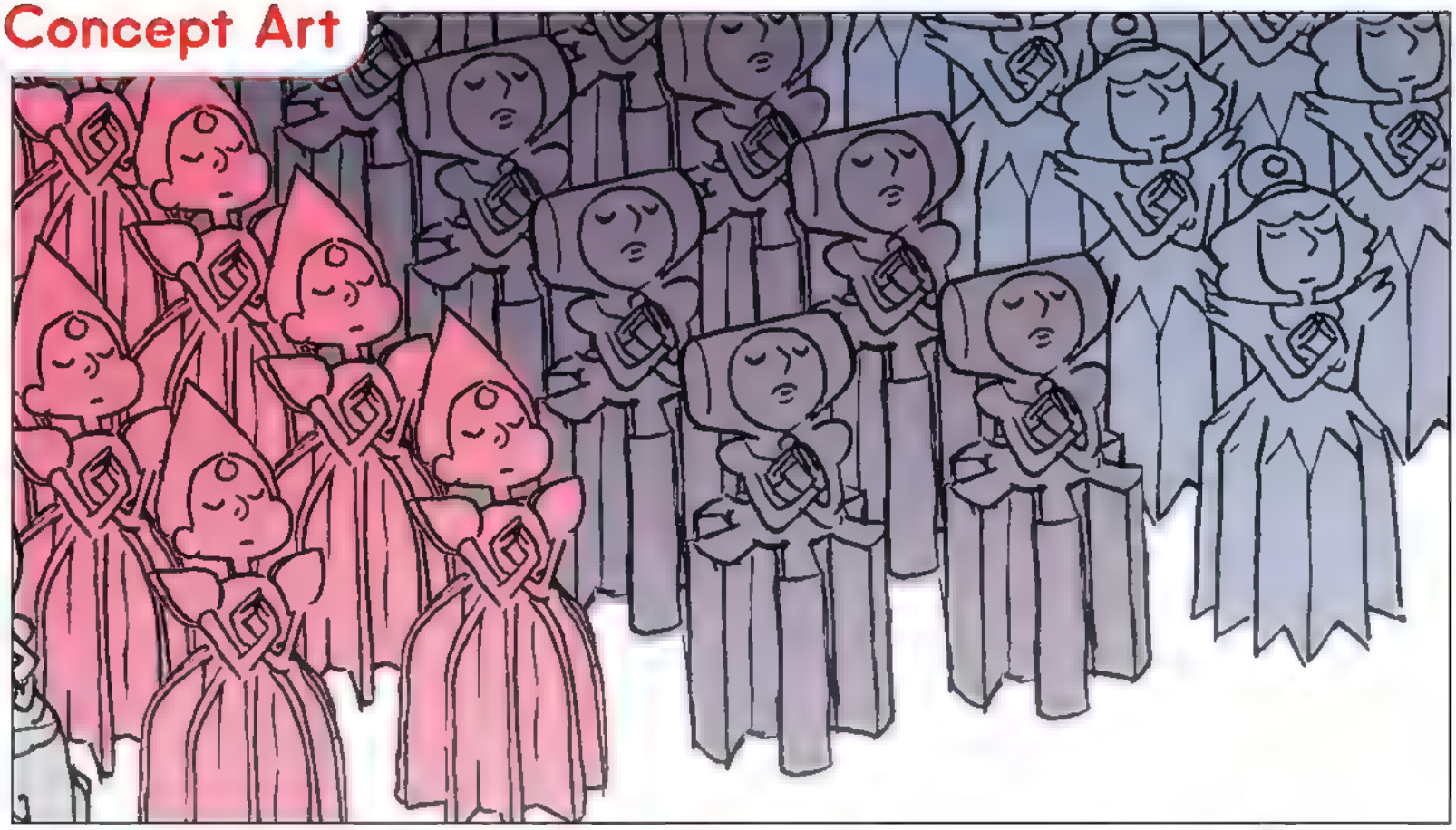
The Ball

In "Together Alone," Steven and Connie fuse during the ball, inspiring an unknown pair of Gems to a so fuse, which draws the instant ire of Blue and Yellow Diamond **Left**: Concept art of the fusion Lemon Jade by Thomas Herp ch, and stills from the episode.



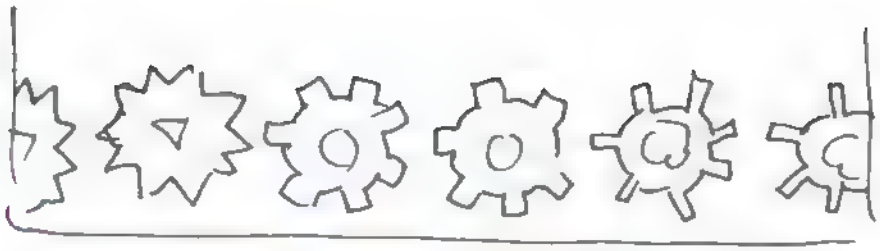
Left Storyboard art by Rebecca Sugar. **Right** Storyboard and pencils by Christine Ebersole with Hilary Florido.

Concept Art

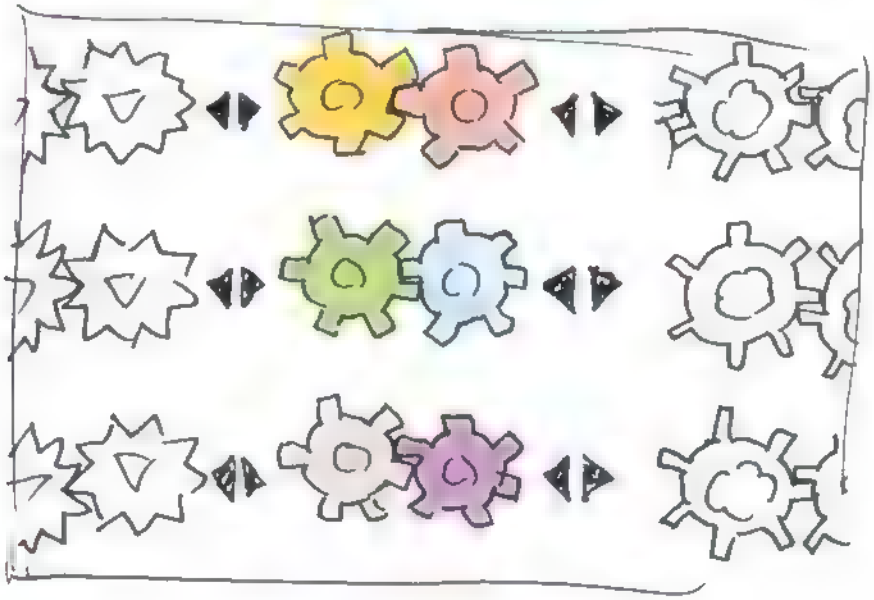


Concept art by Thomas
[illegible] and [illegible]
"[illegible]"

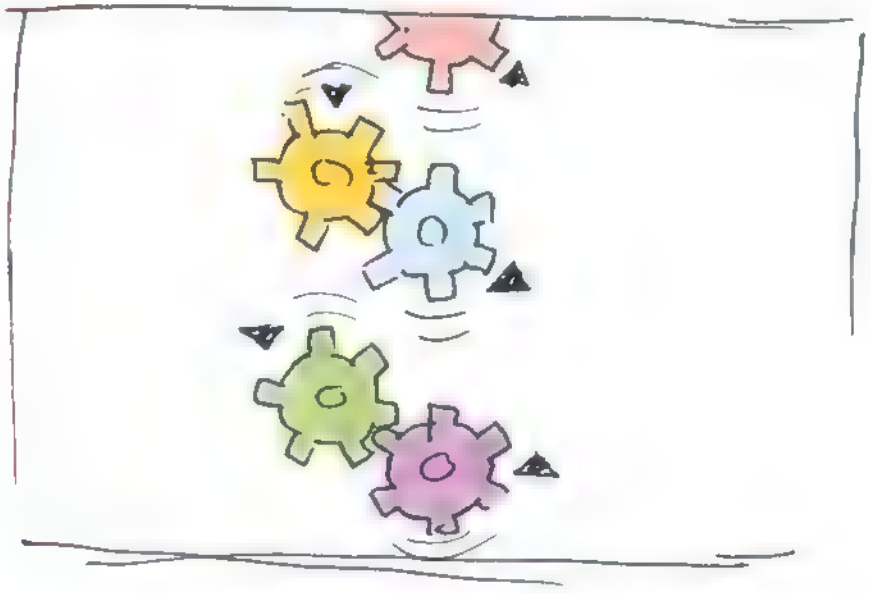
A



B



C



(Continued from page 117)

Homeworld was designed around metaphors for order and inflexibility. It couldn't just look imperial in an Earthly way; it needed to be something beyond the human and beyond the real. The moment Steven leaves Earth is also the moment Steven leaves the world of the literal, and Homeworld's imagery is entirely emotionally driven. We built walls out of jigsaw puzzle pieces because Gem society is a puzzle that can't tolerate a piece that doesn't fit. We included networks of tubes that were inspired by blood vessels because Homeworld treats its Gems as resources that exist to fulfill their functions endlessly. We broke the planet in two and strip-mined the ground because Homeworld has an intense adherence to obligations while covering up the pain and destruction those obligations create.

We wanted to create a visible contrast between two kinds of Homeworld—one that was ornate and ancient and one that was modern and sterile. Era 2 Homeworld is hiding its broken self, burying its Era 1 identity under cold, functional architecture. Its statues and decorative elements are all in ruins, taken over by abstract blocks and tubes that mirror the pained functionality Homeworld's been operating in during Era 2.

Rebecca's fascination with a particular aspect of old Busby Berkeley films was additional fodder for the inspiration for Homeworld.

Rebecca. The idea of people as props is so disturbing to me, and those old Busby Berkeley films—there's one where people are harps that other people are playing; they're standing really still. Even in the "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" sequence with Marilyn Monroe, there are lamps that are made out of people and that are smiling. Someone's only job is to descend a curving ramp keeping their arms as still as possible to just showcase whatever they're wearing. The idea of people smiling, being very still, and being part of the furniture—and that being attractive or lovely!—is just so fascinating to me. The idea that there's this ideal for a human to become more like an object.

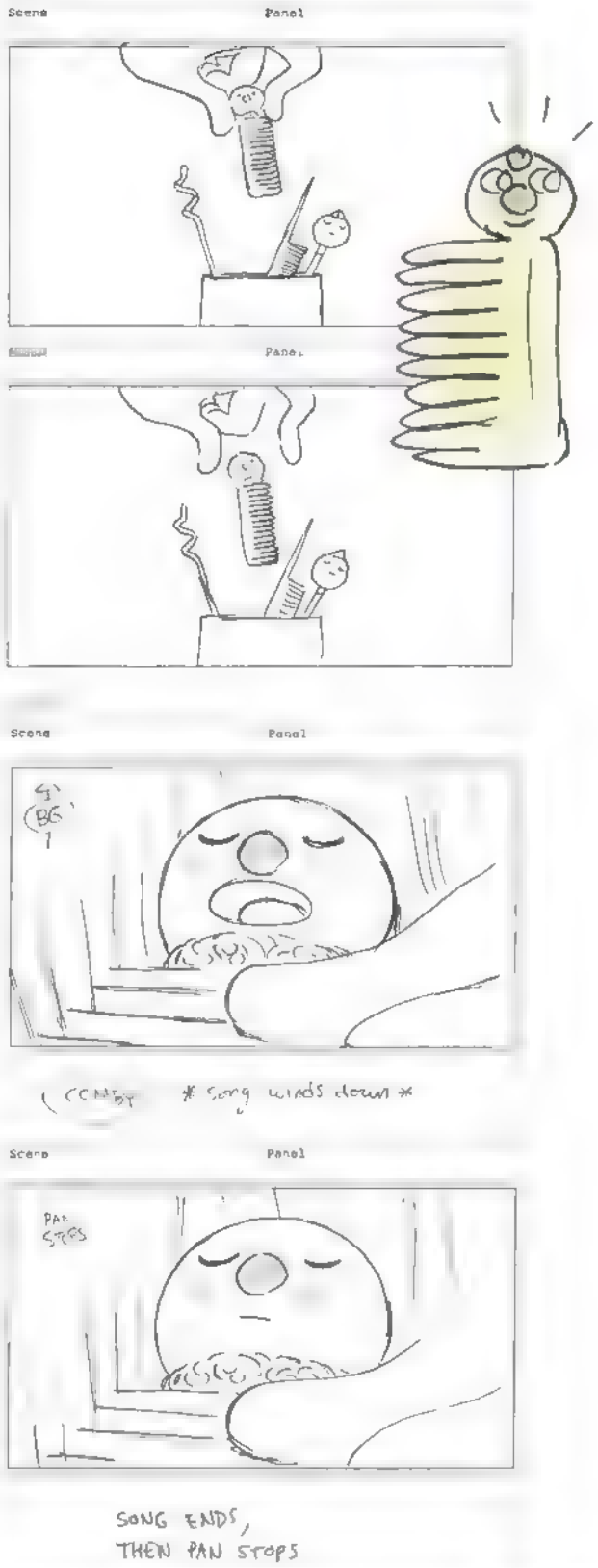
And so I wanted Homeworld to be representative of that—the whole mentality. So a lot of the structures are alive: The bridge is alive, the walls are people. People and objects—the line is so blurred that it becomes nonexistent. Blue Diamond's comb is alive; people are tools, people are props.

The expert anthropomorphism, or inversely, objectification, in Boris Artzybasheff's work was another inspiration. Boris was a Russian-born American illustrator whose work from the mid-twentieth century features fantastic imagery of machines and objects with humanlike qualities performing their work. He also illustrated grotesque distortions of human figures in the cartooning tradition of amplifying emotional or psychological states to the extreme.

Rebecca: Boris Artzybasheff—the idea of these horrifying cogs in a machine that are alive and either excitedly doing their jobs or stuck in this punishing position where their only existence is to pull wire or melt metal and pour it out.

Thomas Herpich, one of Rebecca's past colleagues and a storyboard artist on *Adventure Time*, as well as an occasional collaborator on *Steven Universe*, was brought on board to create specific concept art for the Diamonds' palace and other Homeworld locations. Concept art is a rare indulgence in television animation production, at least in comparison with the amount of concept art produced for a typical big-budget animated feature film. The locations of these final episodes were all practically new, however, and this was the apex of the story, and thus Homeworld doubly deserved a thorough bit of visual development.

Thomas Herpich [storyboard artist]: Rebecca had told me she wanted Homeworld to feel really alien and off-putting. Before I got the details of the assignment, I was brainstorming some really sinister Clive Barker–ish stuff, but in the end, that off-puttingness was mostly evoked by sentient Gems being permanent parts of the architecture—which



Comby concept art by Thomas Herpich for "Familiar" (S5E25).

is still pretty sinister. The only reference I remember her telling me to look at was the work of Boris Artzybasheff, which I thought came through the most in one of the unused bridge designs—the chunky, angular one [on pages 128–129]

I was drawing the scenes with the singing comb on the day FBI director James Comey got fired. I had been glued to the Internet all morning, thinking our government was about to explode. I don't know much about the real world Comey, and I knew even less at the time, but it felt right to commemorate the weird synchronicity somehow, so that's how Comby got her name.

Another past collaborator of Rebecca's was entrusted with concept art: Pendleton Ward, creator of *Adventure Time* (and more). Rebecca requested Pen to work on a very fitting assignment: the creation of the cute little pebbles that live in the walls and floors of Pink's room in the palace.

Rebecca. I sent a few initial doodles to him, and then he came back with all these drawings of the pebbles. They all have names and their own little personalities. This was part of the princess gauntlet that Steven was going to have to go through.

We wanted to hit all the princess staples. For example, we wanted to have "mice" make his clothes. That's what the pebbles are. And I was excited because we set up that pebbles existed. Peridot uses "pebble" as an insult way earlier on in the show.

The other thing about the pebbles is that they're supposed to never really be seen. They have a job to do, but they're supposed to be out of sight and out of mind. So hopefully you get this sense that Pink was giving them a lot of special attention like she does with just about everyone. Talking to them and validating them, venting to them, making them feel special.

The pebbles are part of the fairy-tale-style princess story that Steven experiences when he returns home to his "evil stepmother" (White) and two "evil stepsisters" (Blue and Yellow). The pebbles are the "mice" that make his clothes; the tower that Steven and Connie are locked in is the tower that fairy-tale princesses often get locked in

Rebecca: We knew early on—because this story is very heavily based on *Sleeping Beauty*—that Steven, having been raised in his little cottage in secret by his three fairy godmothers, would eventually return to the palace that he didn't actually know he belonged in. He'd return to fanfare and celebration, and everyone would welcome him there. We hadn't yet worked out the details of what would happen once he reached the palace. So I wrote that chart of the Diamonds to try to keep track of the dynamic among all of them and why they behaved the way that they behaved. From there we designed a gauntlet of princess tropes for Steven, which would get more and more alienating as it went on. The mice making your clothes, having your mind wander when you're supposed to be focusing on your studies, throwing a ball, getting locked in a tower, facing off against the "evil stepsisters," and then the final showdown with the "evil stepmother."

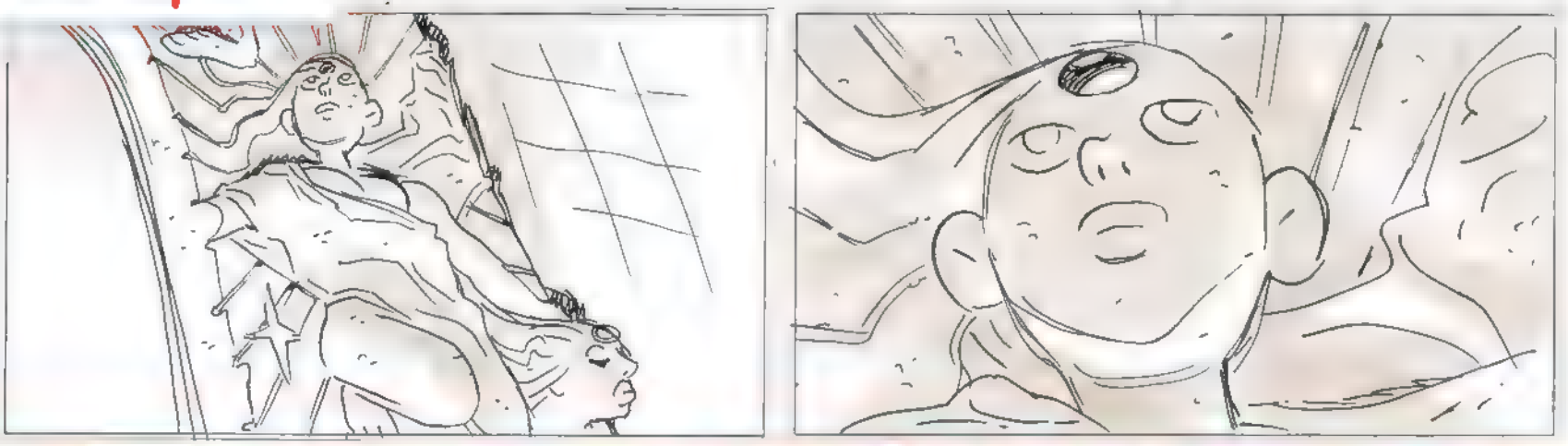
I wanted these tropes to relate to the overall point—being forced to be someone you're not.

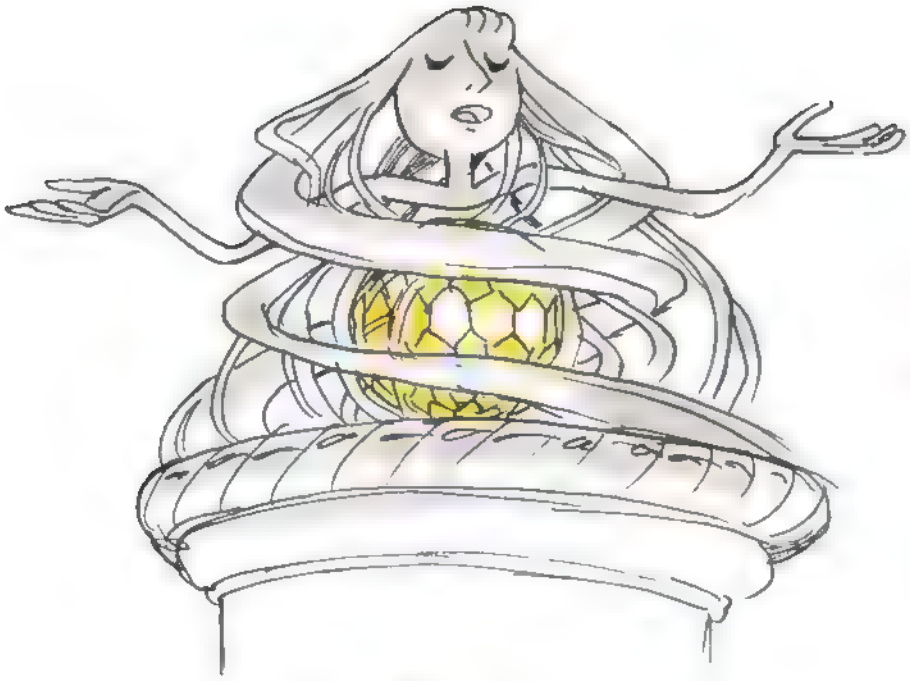
White Diamond's full design is finally revealed, and she has many precedent-breaking features that make her a one-of-a-kind ultimate nemesis for Steven. First of all, her scale is enormous, and when she's looming over her subjects, standing tall or leaning in for a close look, her giant features get more detail than any other character design does, series-wide.

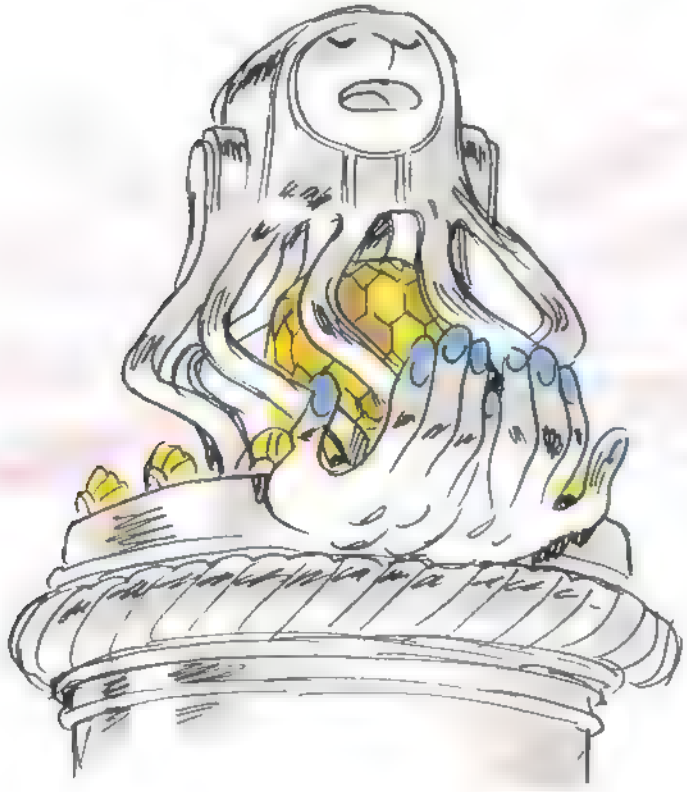
Rebecca: White Diamond is intentionally designed against the grain of everything else that we did in the show: Other characters don't have fingernails, for example, so hers are extremely prominent and important! We had been avoiding certain markers of femininity for Gems, but we gave them all to her. We wanted her to have all these hallmarks of an old, stifling standard of beauty. I remember talking

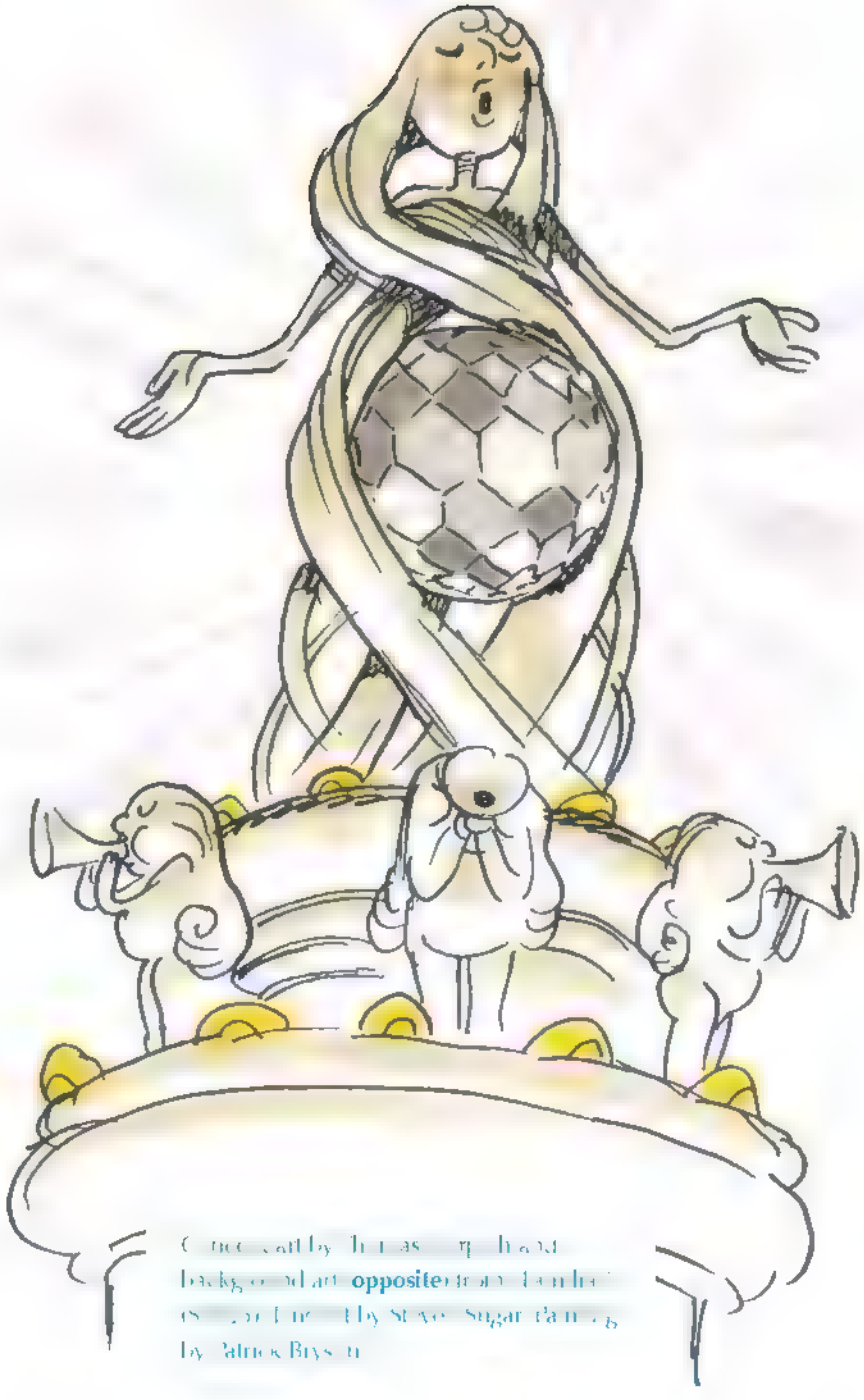
(Continued on page 132)

Concept Art



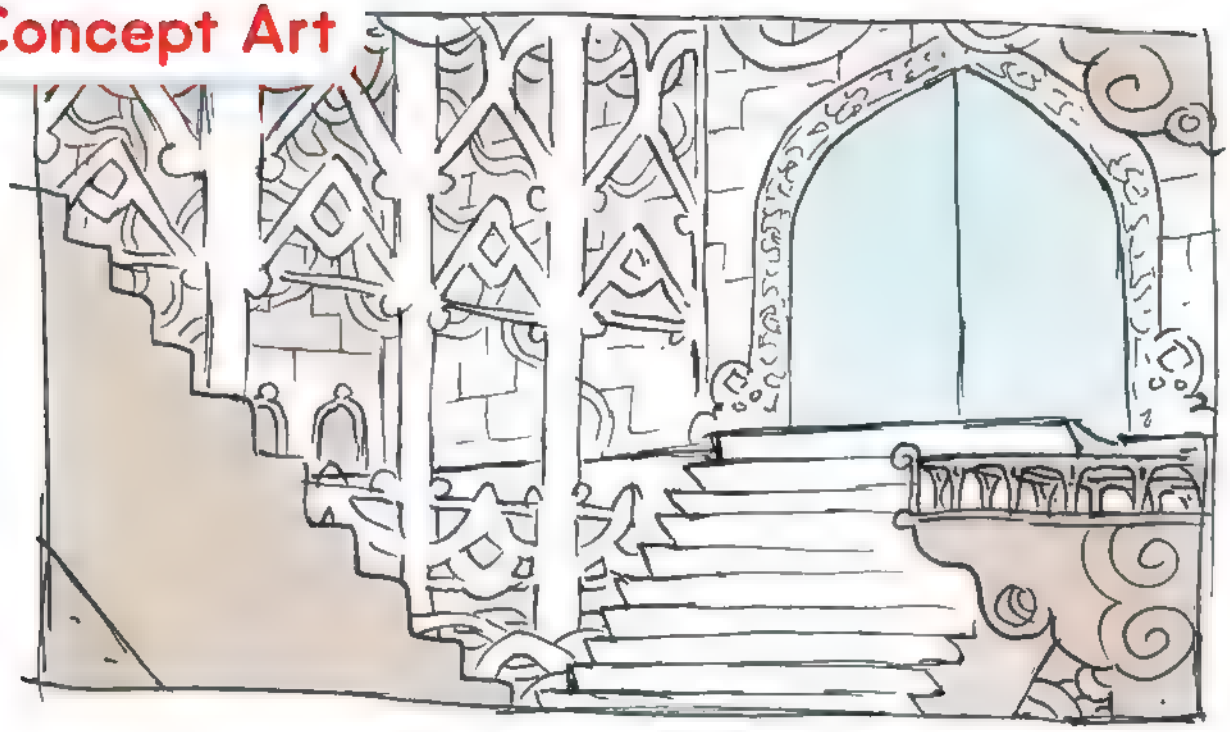


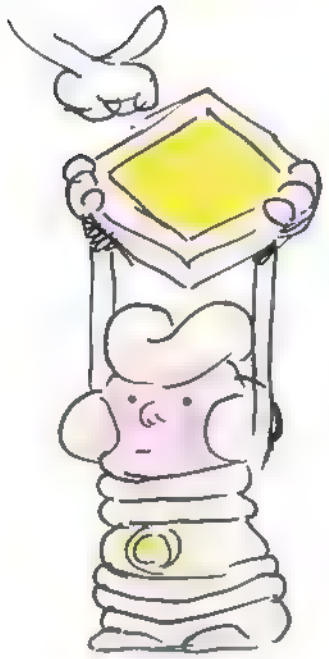


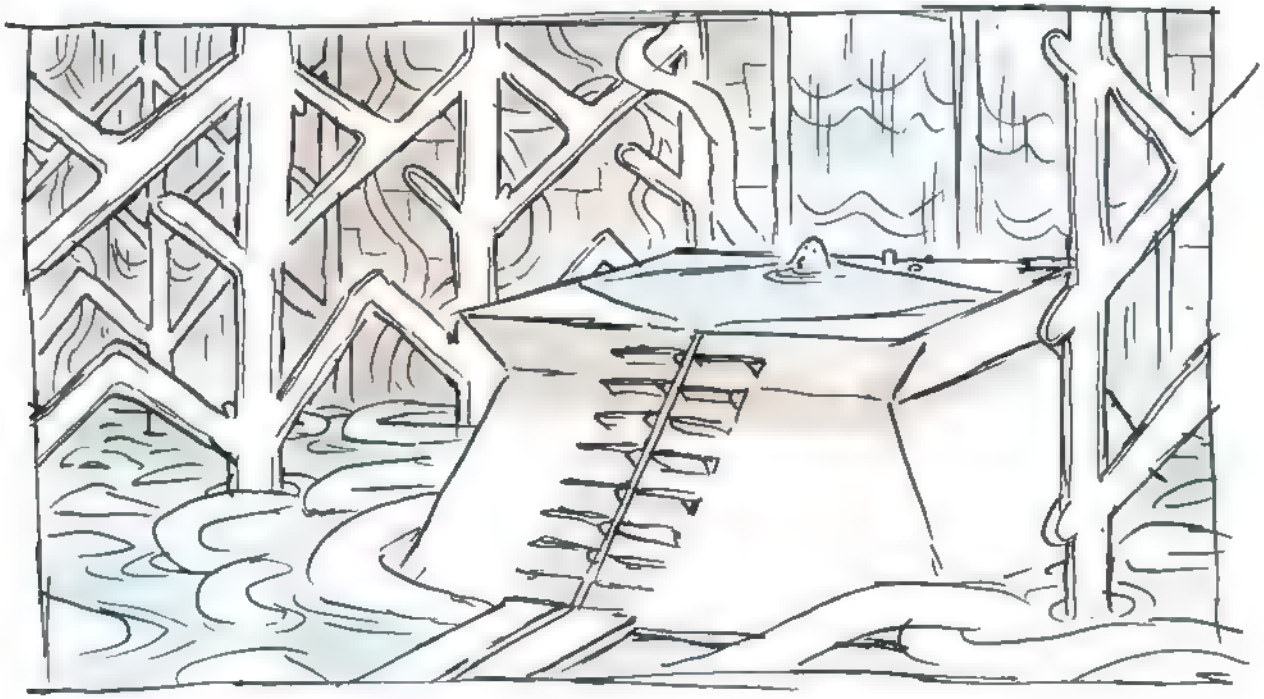


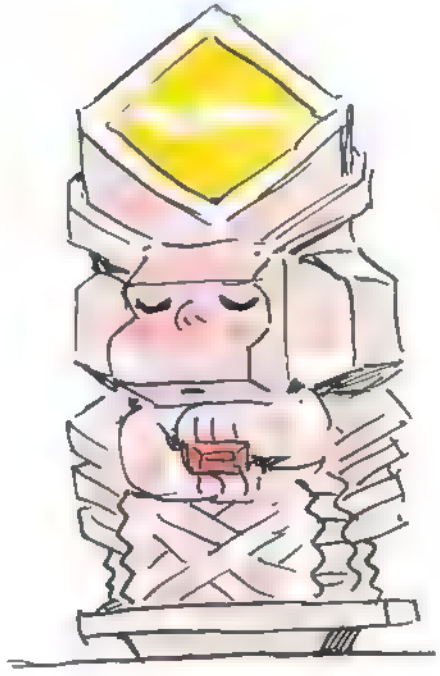
Cutout cat by Thomas Shepherd. Background art **opposite** from *Goodnight Gorilla* by Peter Collington. Cat by Steven Sugar Palmisano. Dog by Patricia Brysson.

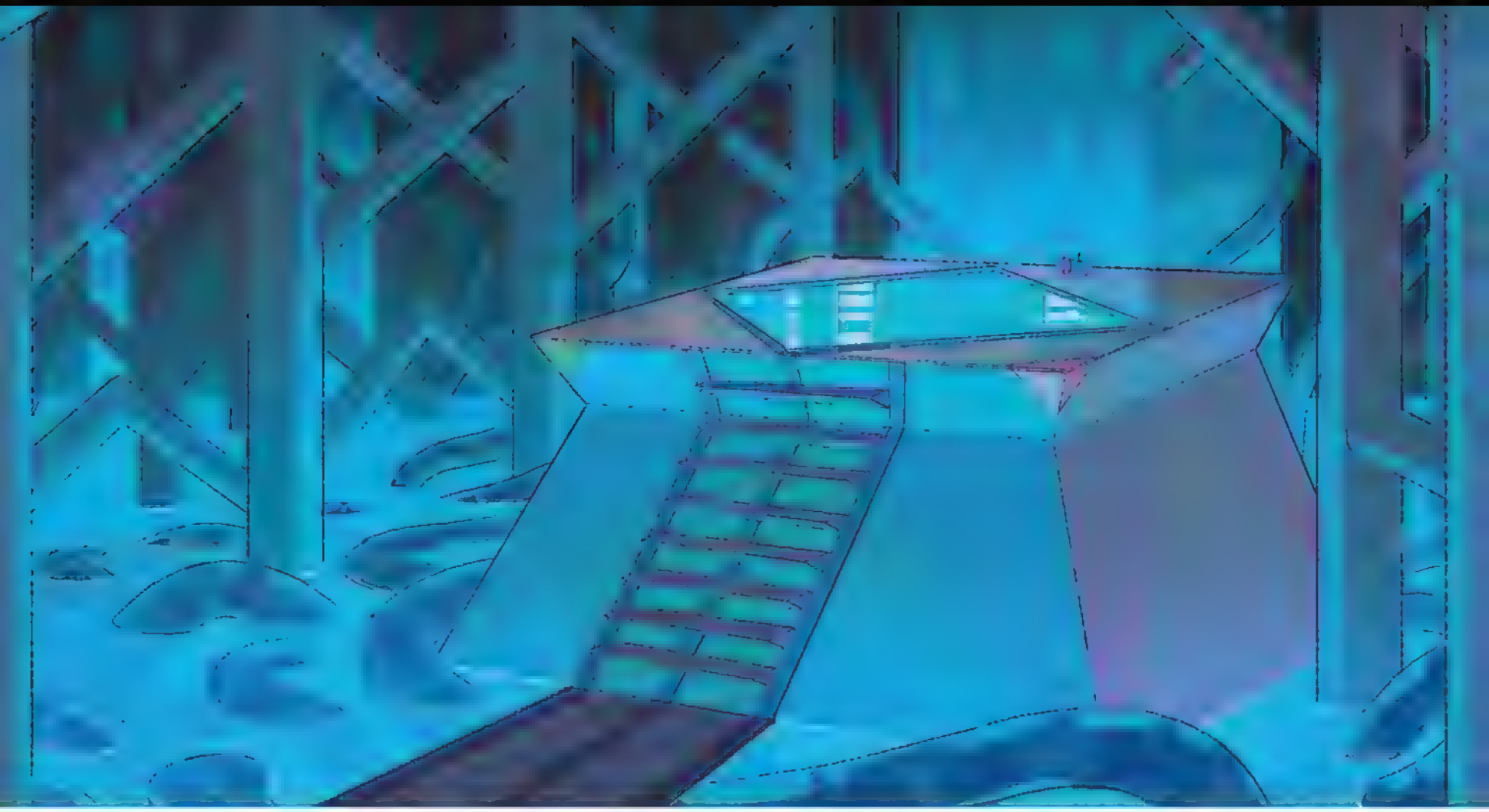
Concept Art

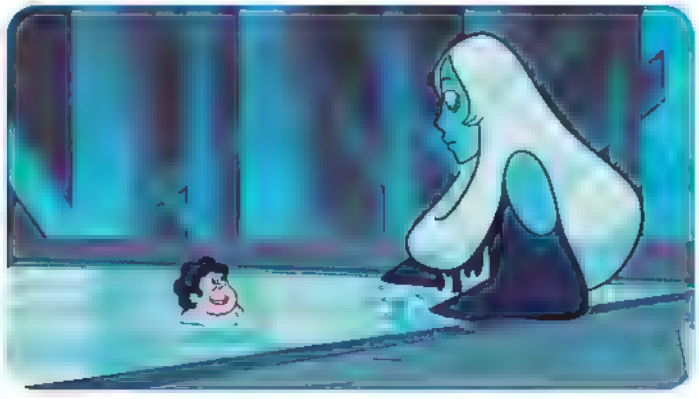


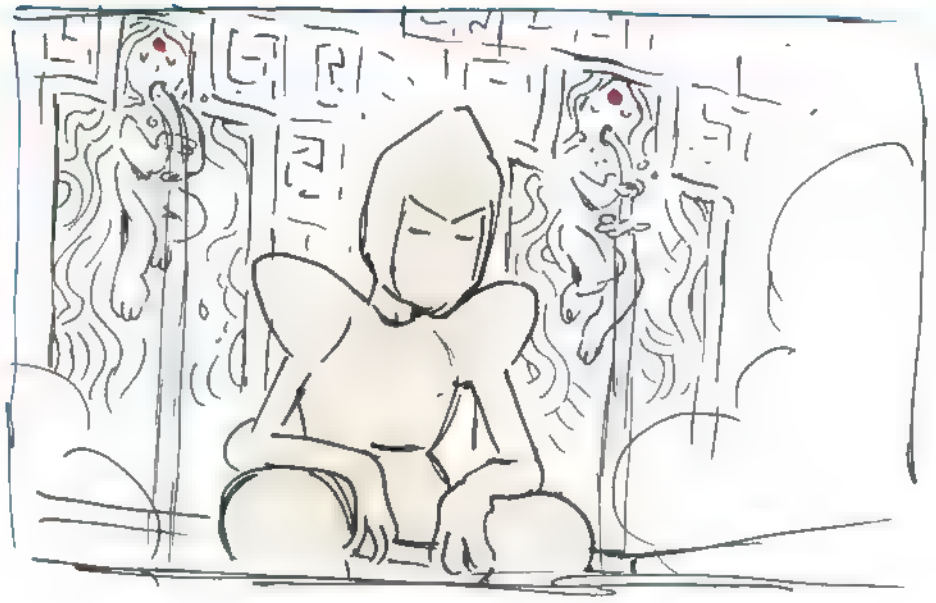






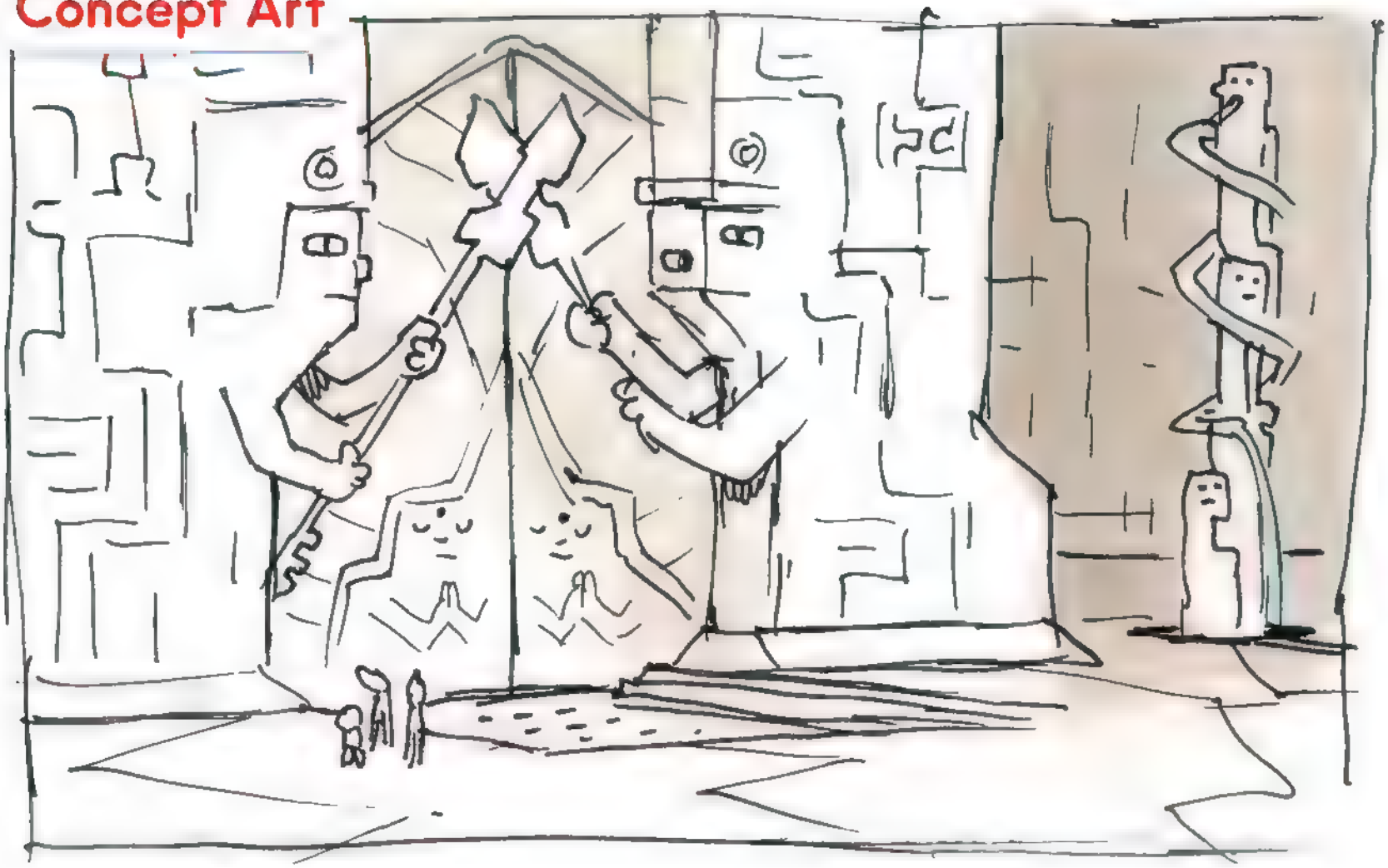


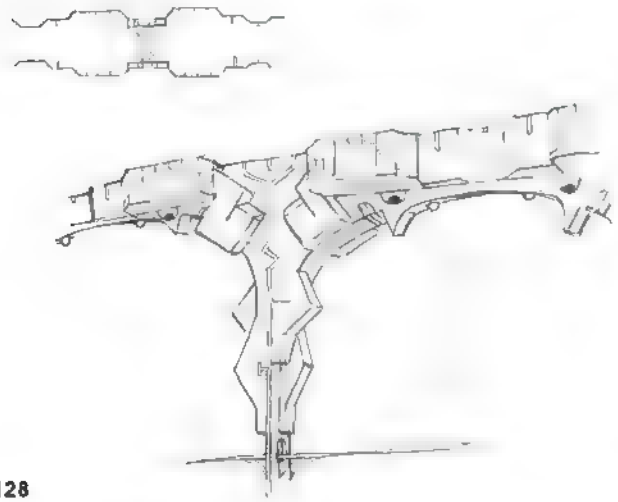


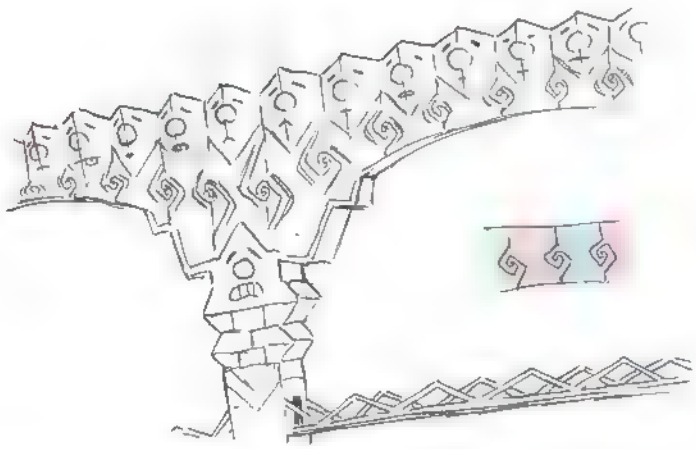


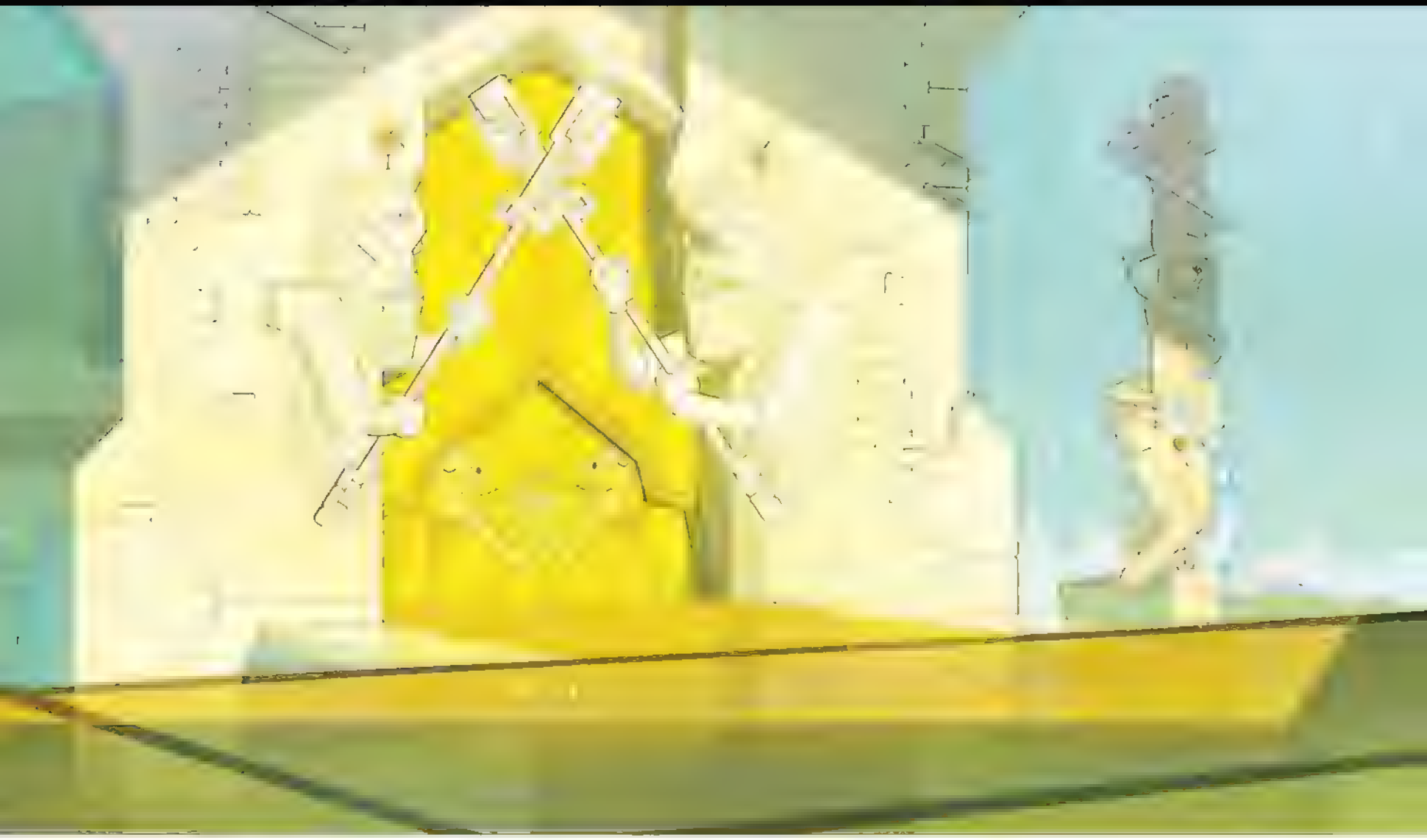
Opposite and right Unreviewed concept art by [illegible] as a guide for background artists; **top** storyboard still **(above)** from "Familiar" [illegible] by Steven Sugar, Mary Nesh[illegible], Ben Levin and Sean Boesche as a background guide by Patrick Bryson, Charles Holcomb and David Mi[illegible]

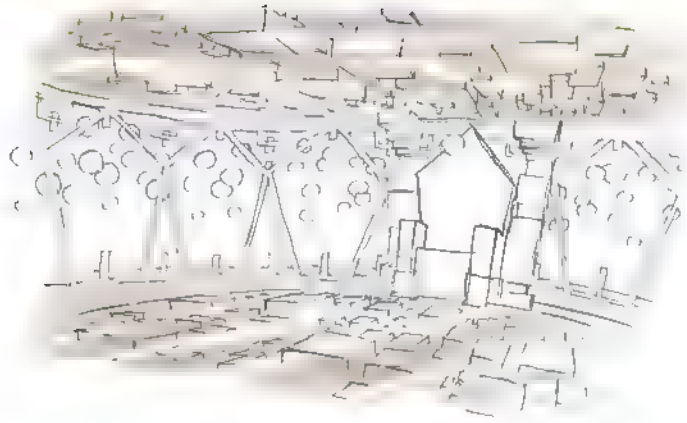
Concept Art

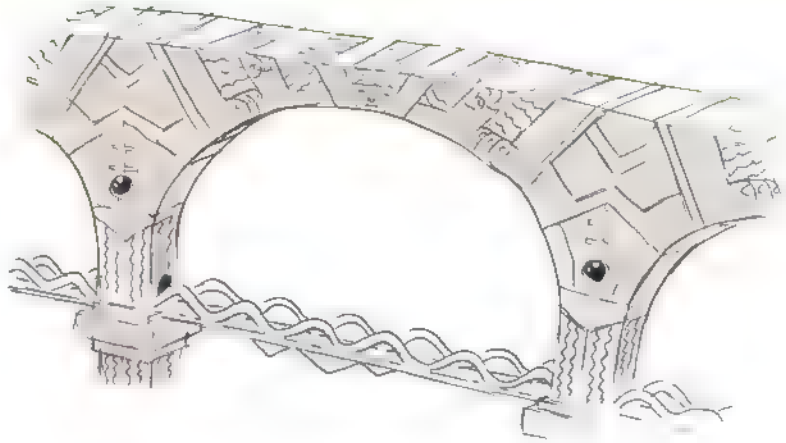






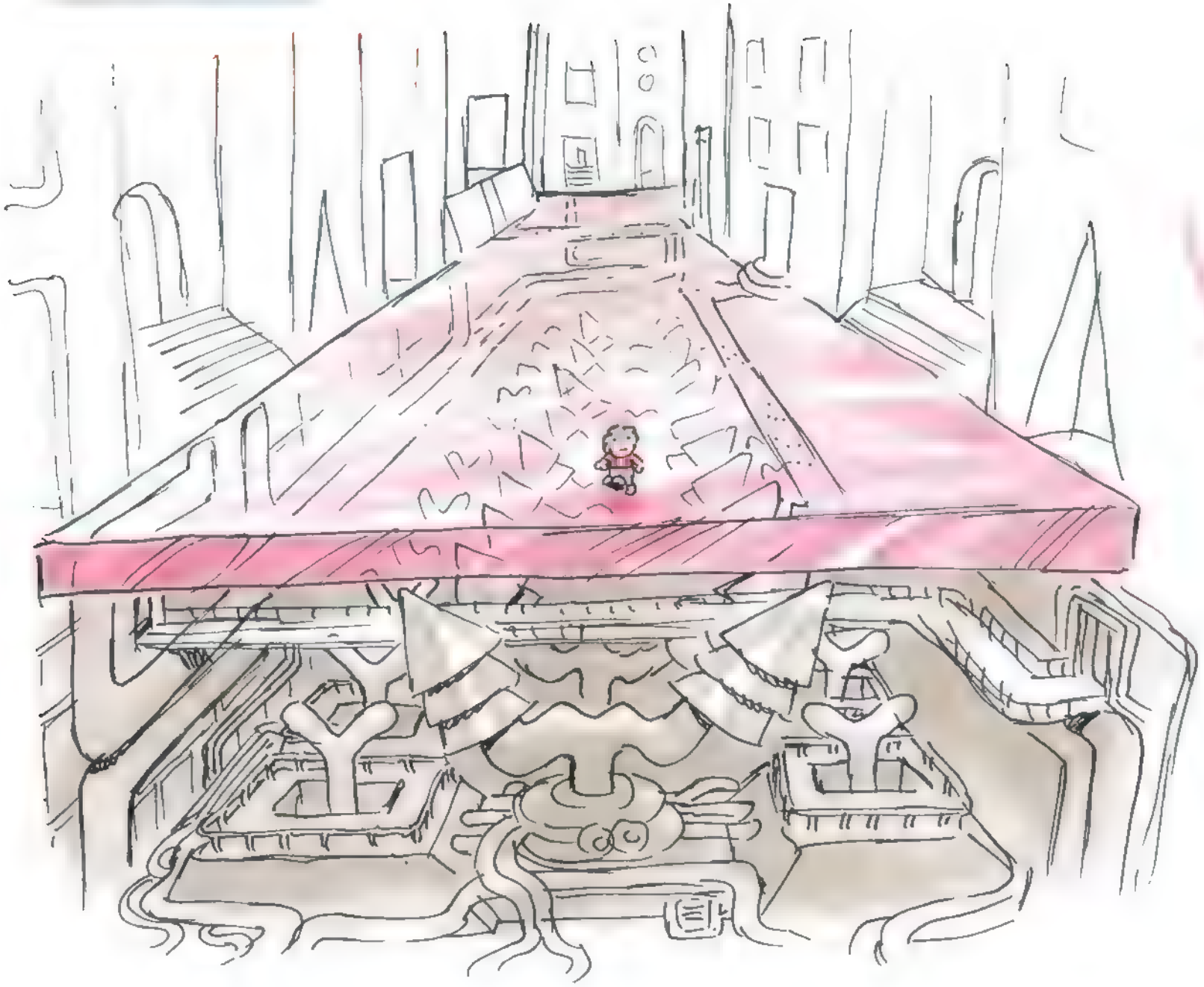


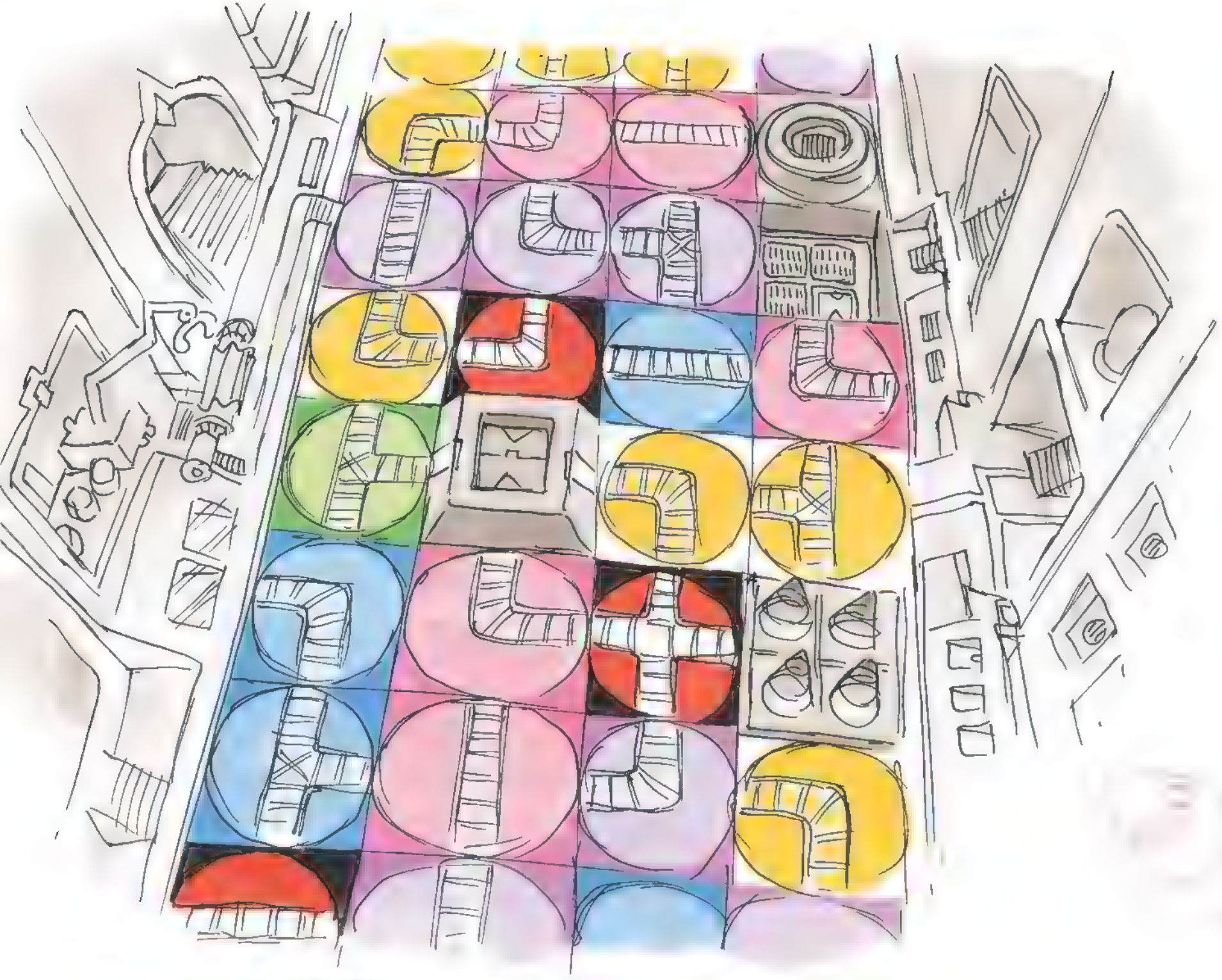




Homeworld concept art by Thomas Herpich. Background art (**above**) from "Familiar." Line art by Steven Sugar. Painting by Patrick Bryson

Concept Art





(Continued from page 123)

a lot about her thigh gap. [*Laughs.*] White has the perfect thigh gap.

Kat Morris [co–executive producer]. We spent a long time on her shoes as well.

Rebecca: She's on a pedestal, and her shoes are pedestals! [*Laughs.*]

White Diamond's design can be traced to the inspiration that Rebecca found in the work of early twentieth-century cartoonist/illustrators Nell Brinkley and Winsor McCay, as well as, again, in the grand musical features of Busby Berkeley.

Rebecca: For Pink and White, I wanted to get this sort of Winsor McCay–clown/Nell Brinkley–girl dichotomy going between them. More inspiration came from Hedy Lamarr in *Ziegfeld Girl* and Busby Berkeley in general because, again, I was always fascinated by the use of people as props. There's a sequence in *Ziegfeld Girl* with Hedy Lamarr—she's got this awesome sparkling white cape with stars all around her head that we looked at for a very long time when thinking about White.

Tonally, Rebecca wanted White to have a certain air of restrained, domineering rigidness and power. A particularly "deep cut" of a reference was the short film *The Story of Menstruation*.

Rebecca: *The Story of Menstruation* is a short that Kotex commissioned Disney to make in the fifties. They would play it in schools and hand out a pamphlet called "Very Personally Yours." I saw it back in college, and it really stuck with me.

White Diamond is very much based on the narrator from this short: a kindly woman's voice, an older woman telling you what this is going to mean for you. There's this one part where there's a girl at her vanity. She's brushing her hair and she's getting upset, and this woman's voice is telling her not to become emotional because people are going to have to interact with her. It's unpleasant and unattractive. . . .

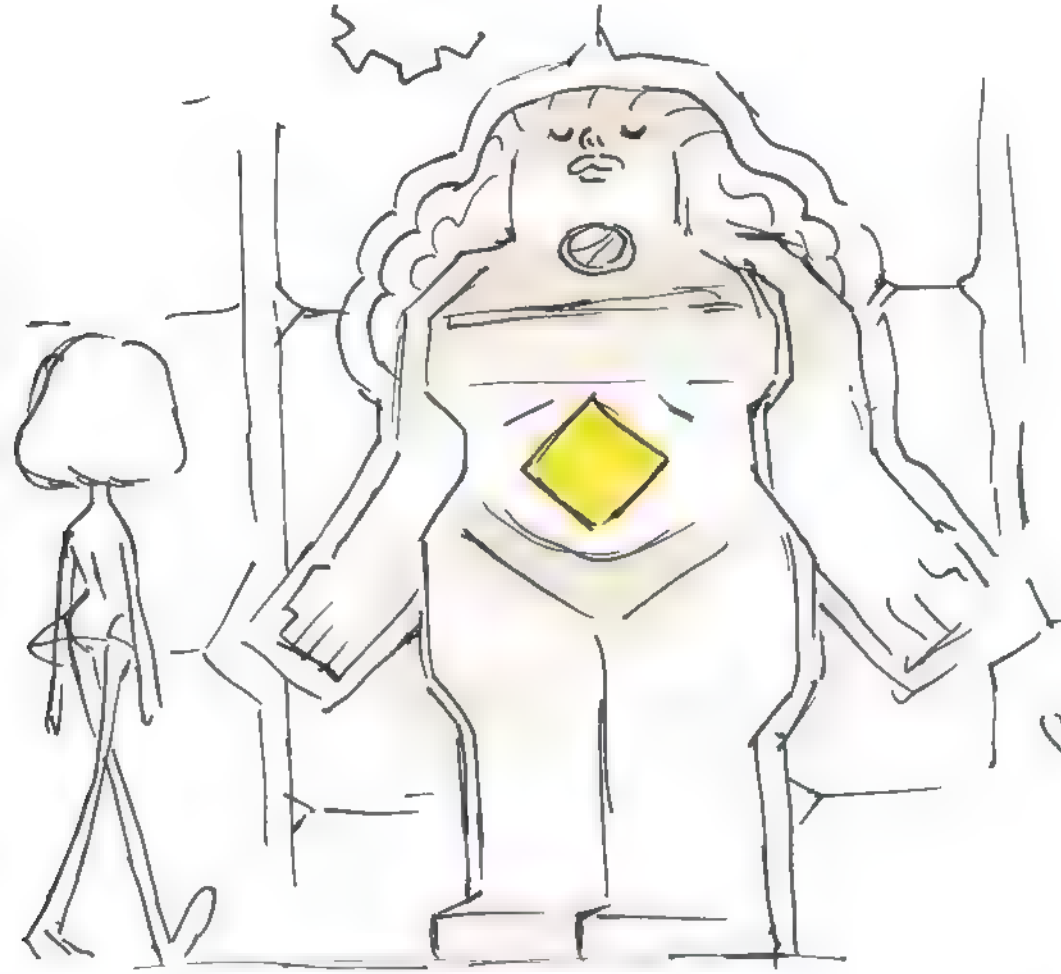
The girl is sobbing into her arms on her vanity, and as the woman is telling her that she needs to become less emotional, the girl's reflection in the mirror straightens up and smiles and fixes her hair. Then it pans to the next scene. The reflection cheers up and fixes herself, but the real her is still weeping!

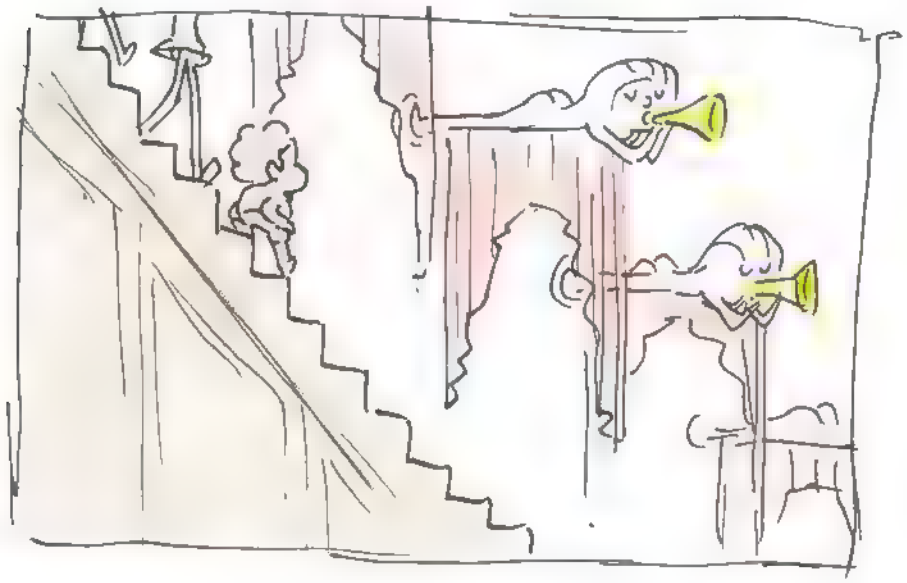
It's so bizarre. The short just moves on, and the narrator continues, "Keep doing everything that you normally do," like dancing with boys or cleaning the house. It leaves this sobbing person behind, and I was so struck by that. I wanted White Diamond to be that voice that tells you that you can't express yourself. That it would be unpleasant for you to burden other people with whatever is going wrong with you.

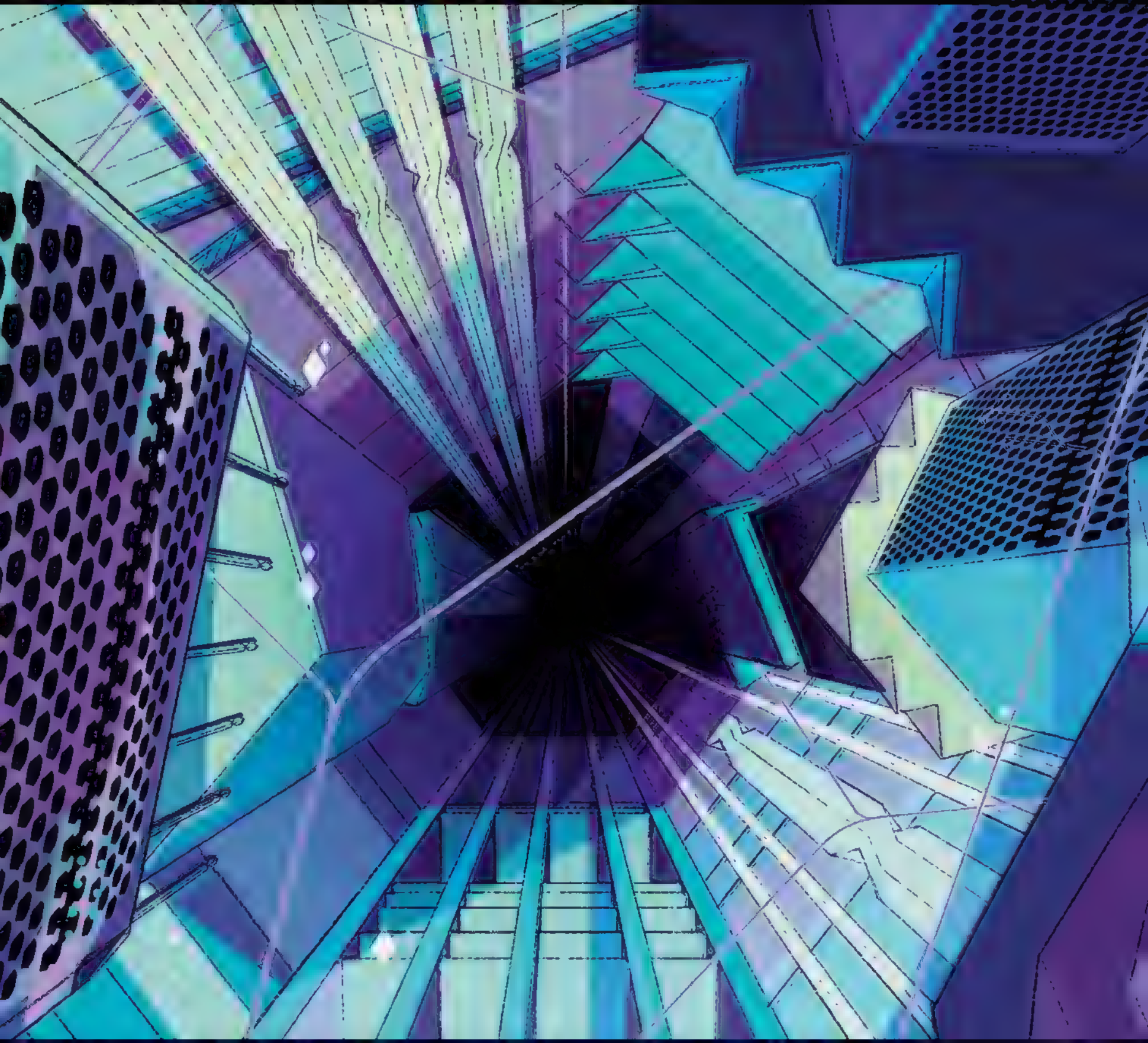
Steven gamely runs the gauntlet of princess tropes until things begin to break down, and we see him suffering under the weight of the roles and responsibilities that are foisted upon him by White, Blue, and Ye low

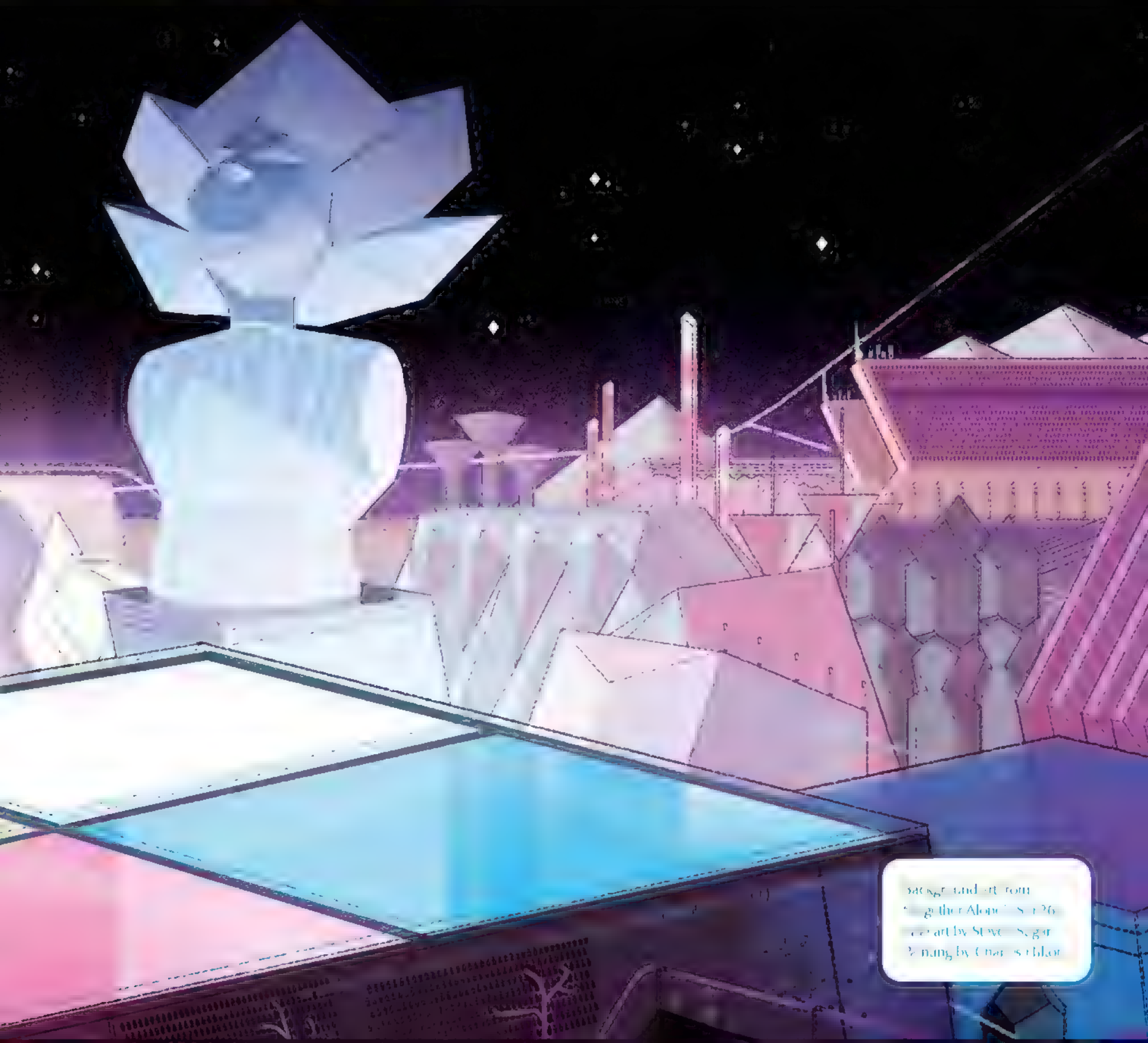
Rebecca. Steven is being forced to be Pink—and he's not her. The longer he stays, the longer he's gaslit into forgetting that he is his own person. We organized it to have each princess story chip away at his integrity until he's almost ready to believe it when White Diamond says that he never really existed at all.

The Diamonds' inability to acknowledge that Steven is not Pink and furthermore, that he is a human—is their ultimate undoing. The stage was set for the final showdown as Steven and his freethinking companions gathered for the challenge.

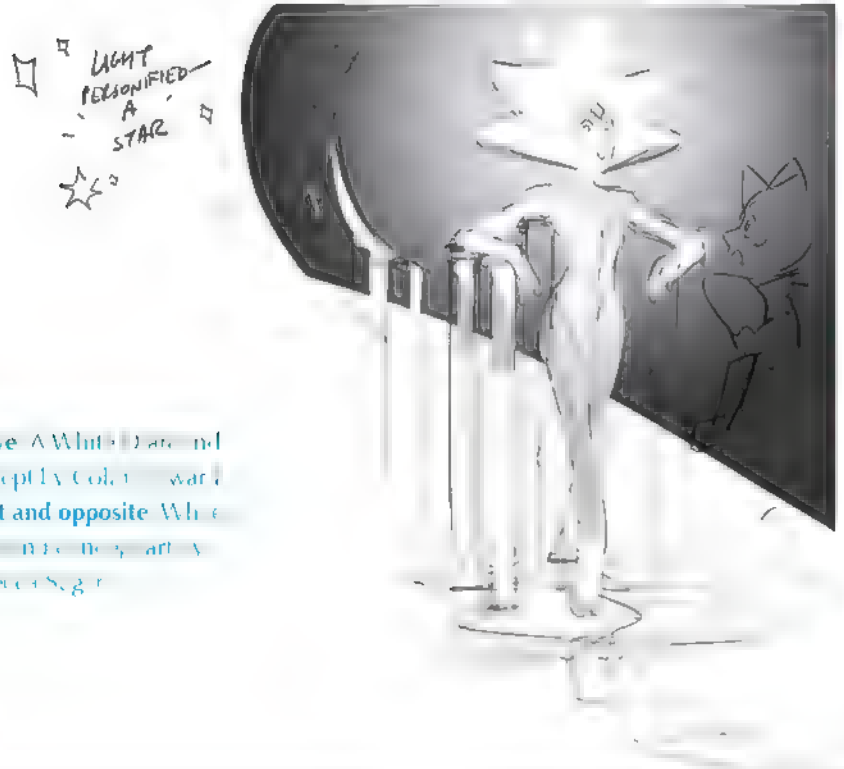


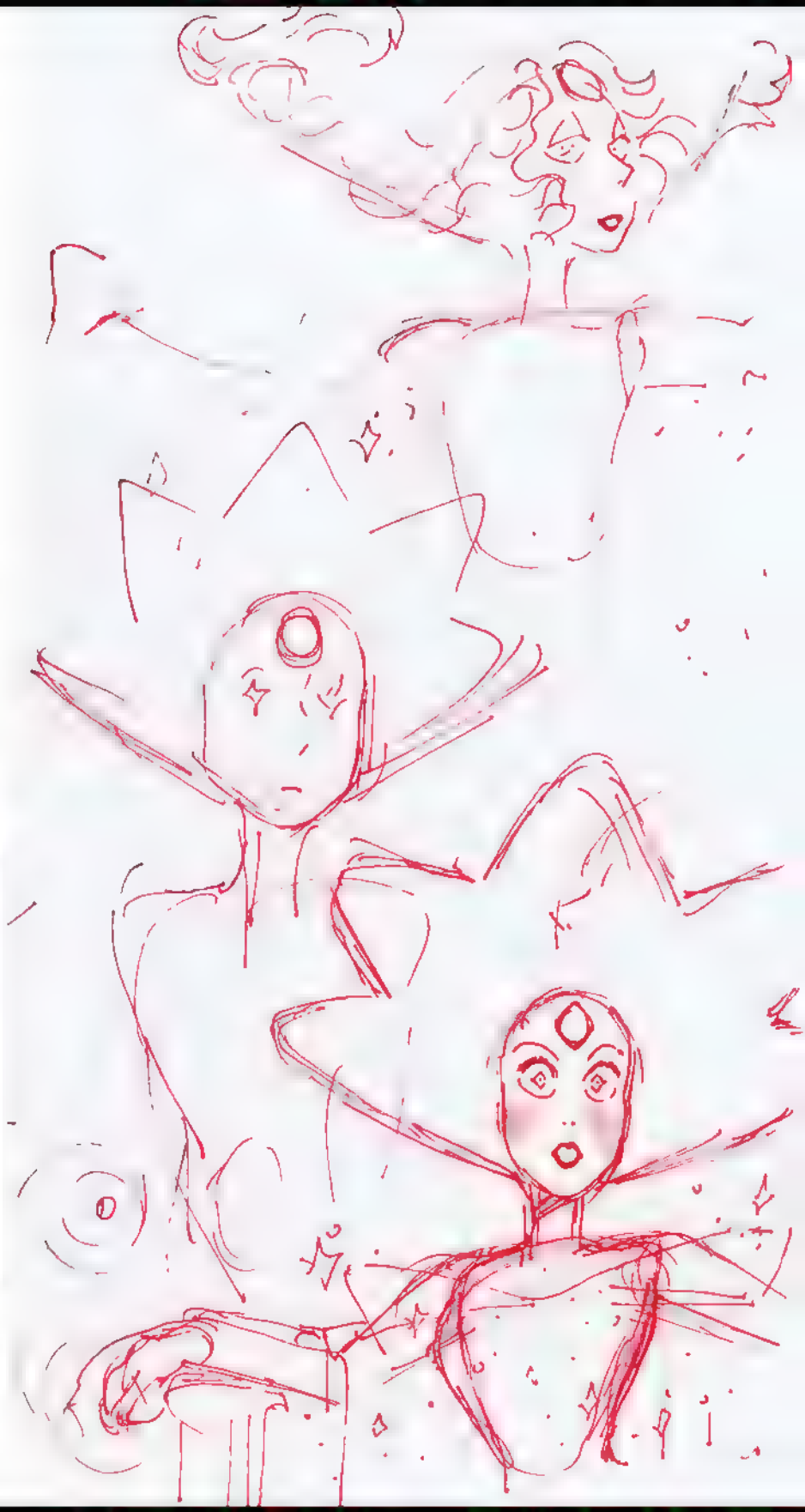






White Diamond





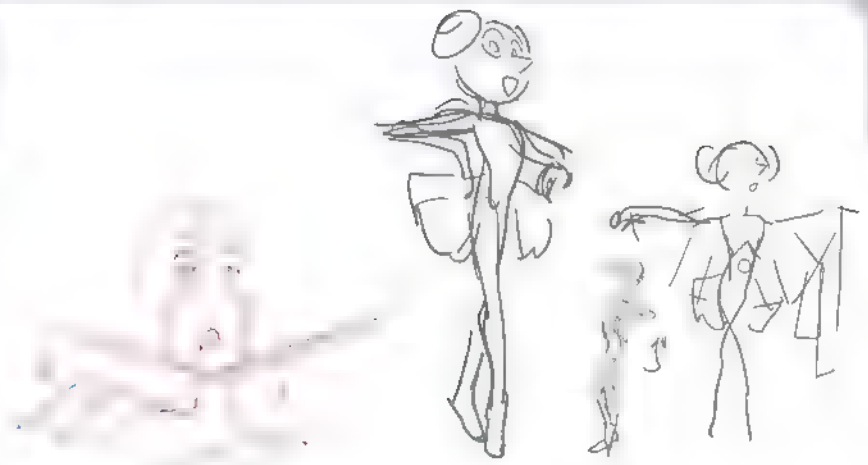
Above A White Diamond concept by Colleen Evard

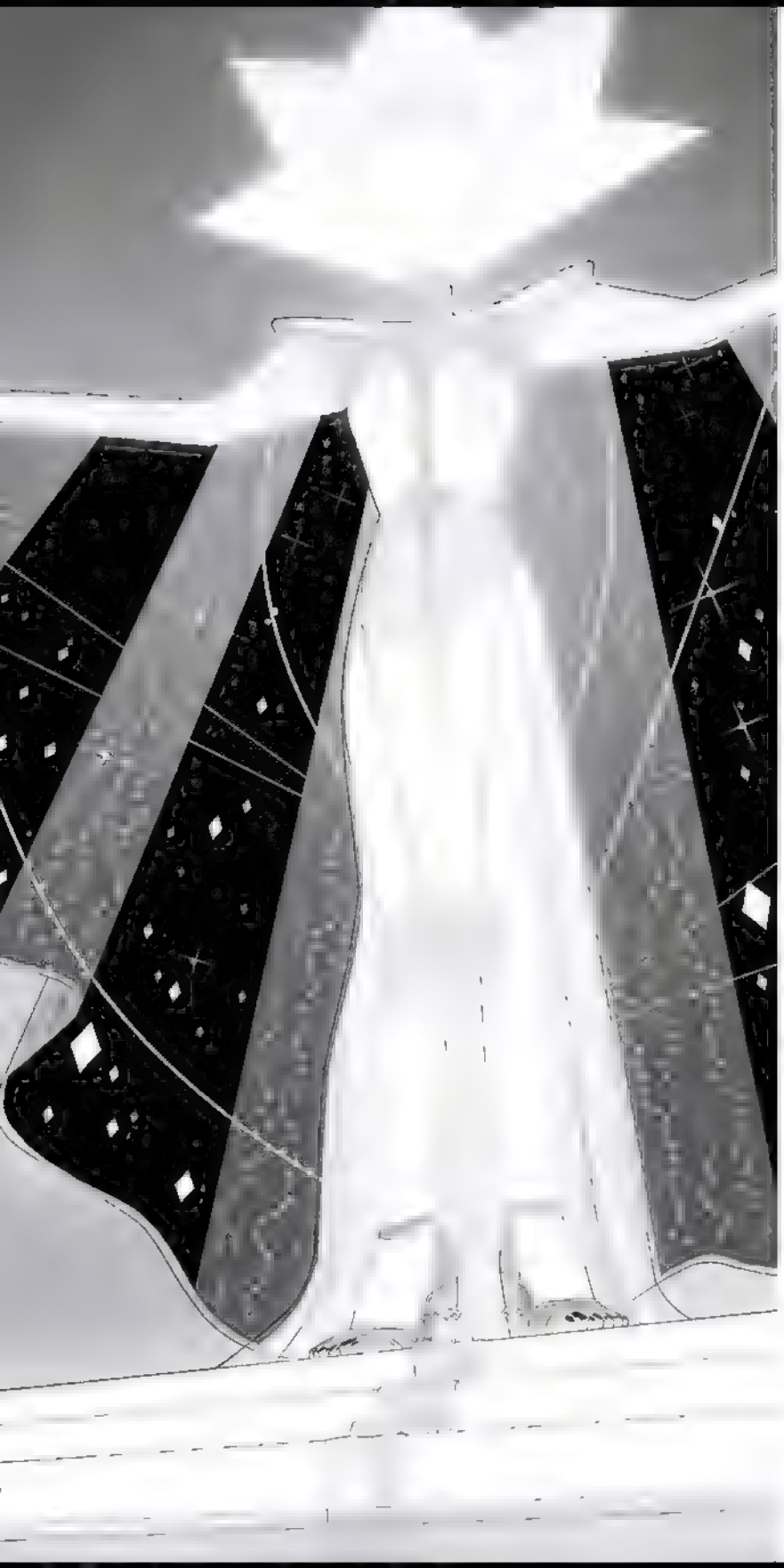
Right and opposite White Diamond by Rebecca Sugar

White Diamond

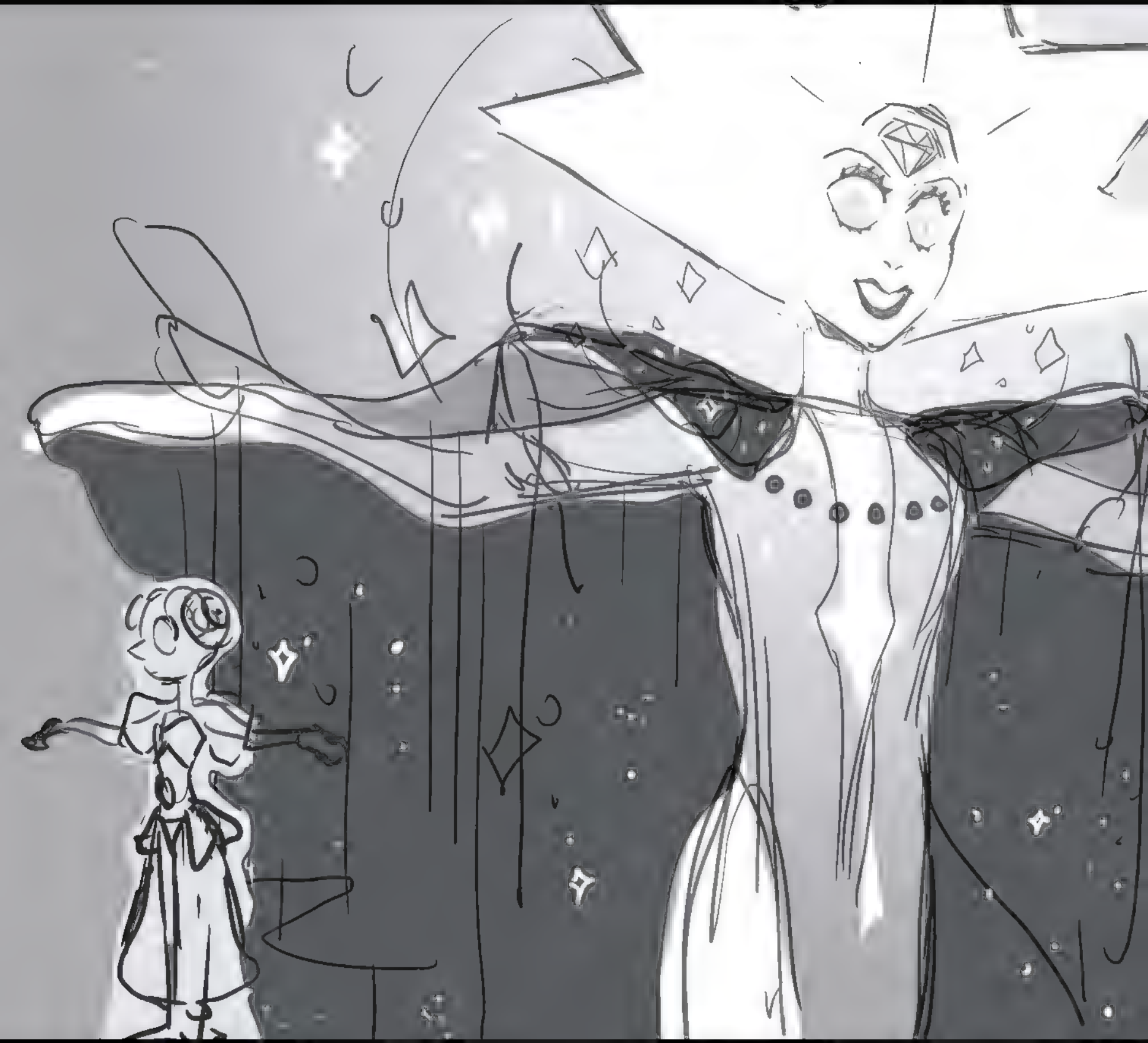
Above White Diamond model sheet and art by Aleth Kondratiuk, Gavin Howard and Rebecca Sugar. Color by Jean Tafras.
Right Art by Rebecca Sugar.

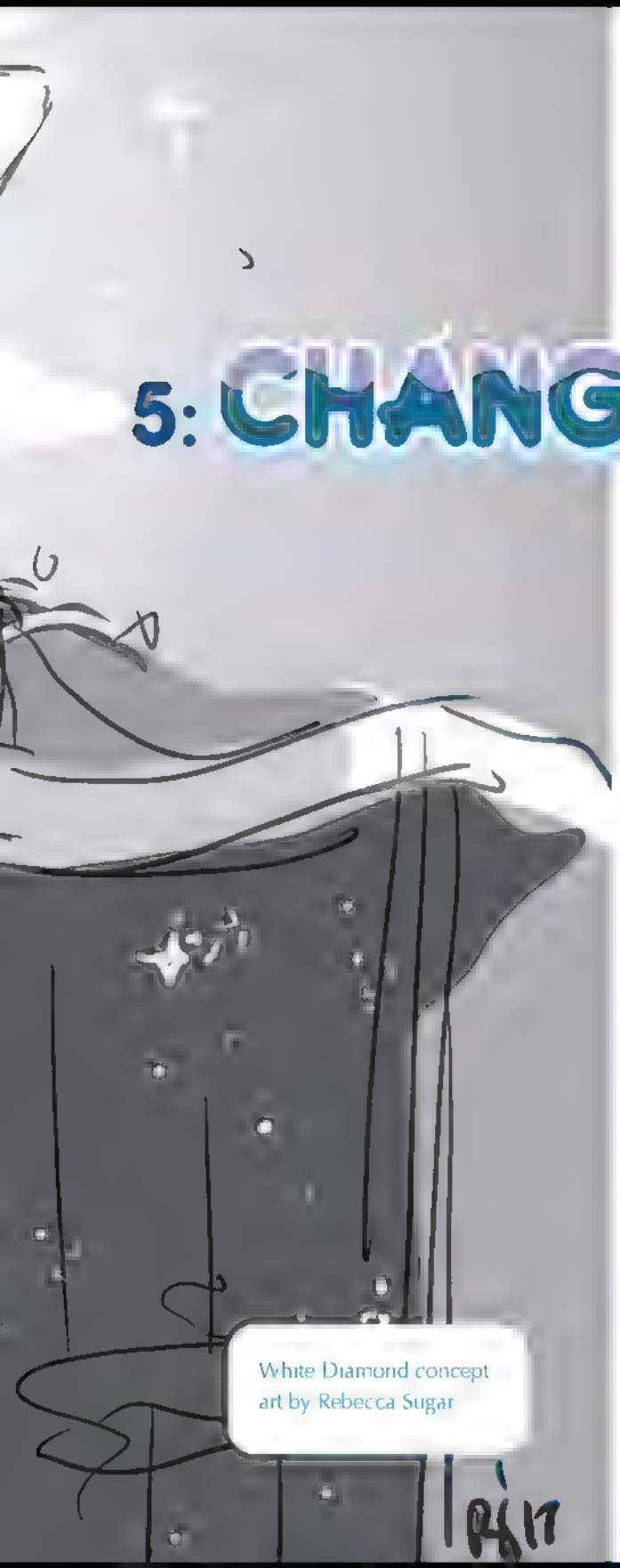
Rebecca Sugar White Diamond first appears in "Legs from Space." In new additional body is a static background character only her face is animated. This saves time and money. It is a Disney feature animators in a Sleeping Beauty (1959) which used this technique where Sleeping Beauty walks.





Left. Color by Elle Michalka Line art by Steven Sugar. **Below:** Rough line product art featuring three of the Diamonds. **Above.** Line art by Rebecca Sugar.





White Diamond concept art by Rebecca Sugar

5: CHANGE YOUR MIND

The most consequential—and heated—argument that was ever waged in the *Steven Universe* writers' room took place in 2013, during early season one production. It centered around the concept of "Perfect Steven."

Rebecca Sugar [series creator]: People ask me, "What's the hardest thing on the show?" or "What's the most disputed thing among the crew?" It was this. I've never been able to give the real answer until now, because this "Perfect Steven" concept is used heavily in *Future*

We had this amazing writers' meeting while we were on the first season, and around this time, I was drawing "Perfect Steven." We knew that Steven was Rose and Pink, and I was starting to experiment with him tapping into his Pink powers, becoming her size, and having his hair turn pink. We were calling it "Perfect Steven mode." At this writers' meeting, we got into a heated argument over this. We all ultimately agreed that we could never do Perfect Steven, because Steven is perfect the way he is. If we were to say this form of Steven is Perfect Steven, we would be undercutting the premise of the show

What was potentially going to be a series-altering concept was originally intended to be revealed as a by product of revealing Steven's fusion abilities

Rebecca: My original pitch for "Giant Woman" [S1E12] had ideas in it that we ended up bringing back for "Change Your Mind" [S5E28]. In its oldest version, it was going to be the fusion episode; the original pitch had Steven actually being able to fuse at the end of it. He fuses with one of the Gems, and then at the end, when he un-fuses, it separates out his Gem and human halves. And that was the original "Perfect" or "Pink Steven" story. There was going to be the Pink Steven separated out from this human side, a puddle of a person, not held together by magic anymore. Then Pink Steven would have taken that human puddle back into himself and fused with it again. I had that in my pitch packet, planned for episode ten, but ultimately saved it and expanded on it in episode 162 ["Change Your Mind"].

I liked thinking about how Steven worked as a character. We always understood him as a fusion of himself and himself, which we tracked throughout the show. In "Three Gems and a Baby" [S4E9], everyone's trying to figure out what he is. Garnet thinks he's a fusion, Amethyst thinks he's Rose but shape-shifted, and Pearl thinks that he has Rose trapped inside him. They all make good points, and we needed to set up all these possibilities in order to eventually reveal how he truly works.

We would debate strongly among us: Is Rose really gone or not? Is she inside him? The questions that the show makes you ask are questions that we

asked internally, and we would debate them furiously. We were all of the mind that Rose had to be truly, completely gone—the alternative is too disturbing. But what does that mean for Steven? Early on he's so worried about what Rose would think of him and worried that he can never connect to her. We thought about creating a way for him to tap into her, inside of him, to be able to get that connection. We all argued about that pretty explosively because any shred of her being there . . . would make his body like Lapis's mirror; it would mean that he's a prison that's trapping her inside him—and again, it's too alarming. These heated discussions during season one is where the whole end of the show came from. "What does it mean that he has his mother's Gem?"

What we arrived at, in the end, is that when Pink Steven—his Gem self—is separated from his human self, he's devoid of all humanity. He's not Perfect Steven—he's missing the most critical parts of Steven, everything that makes him human. He needs his human self to be his complete self, and neither of those selves are actually his mother. We arrived at that after coming together as a group and trying to figure out why it was upsetting us all so much, the idea of a "better" version of him that's more powerful—because being more powerful doesn't necessarily make you better.

The extraordinary animation for the climactic reveal of Pink Steven, and the statement about Steven's "Steven-ness," was produced by James Baxter, noted feature animation artist and animator of standout segments on other recent television shows, such as Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time* and the opening credits of Disney's *Gravity Falls*.

Rebecca: In general, I like to have the thing that is the most obvious also be the most amazing. Part of the goal early on was to have these characters that came from space with these fantastic backgrounds be fascinated by the minutiae of human life—an inversion of what you might normally expect from a fantasy show. So I wanted to carry that through the whole story: that the really exciting reveal about Steven is that he's Steven. [*Laughs.*] That's the ultimate reveal of the show. And I hope that a lot of the show will have the effect of making people realize the incredibleness of the very basic things that are happening day to day, instead of always looking for a fantastical story.

While the show's thesis about the experience of being marginalized is especially highlighted in the slate of episodes leading up to "Change Your Mind," it is also accompanied by an affirmatively positive message about the importance of self-love. Showing characters working through adversity and coming out with strengthened integrity and the ability to enjoy the freedom that they deserve—just as much as anyone else—was all part of the plan. Steven's showdown with White is a statement of individualism and integrity, encapsulated in the lyrics to the "Change Your Mind" song that he sings:

> I don't need you to respect me, I respect me
> I don't need you to love me, I love me
> But I want you to know you could know me
> If you change your mind
> If you change your mind
> If you change your mind
> Change your mind

As the battle for freedom—for peace on Earth and across the universe—is resolved; as the Diamonds realize the error of their rule; and as the Off Colors, Steven, and a whole host of un-bubbled Gems settle on Earth and begin building a new existence, another series-wide theme comes back into focus: the experience of being a first-generation citizen in a new place.

Ian Jones-Quartey [former co–executive producer]: That factors heavily into the story. When we were coming up with different characters and side characters, the Pizza family was based on my family. In that family you notice that the younger kids have no accents. They're super Americanized, and their dad

Above: Storyboard panels of Steven's breakdown by Joe Johnston

Above: "Change Your Mind" personal promotional images created by Patrick Bryson and Leonard Hung

and their grandma feel much older, from an older generation, which was very much my experience growing up.

A lot of immigrant families have experiences of someone moving away and then sort of trying to start a new life for themselves—a new family, a new identity. I had gone through something similar in my family right when we were starting the show: I have an older brother who completely disconnected himself from the family and went off and changed his name and started a new identity for himself. I thought, "Well, what if we use those themes with a character who had problems and made mistakes, but was trying to run away from what she perceived as an unjust system?" When you disappear without resolving your mistakes, you unknowingly hurt people on both sides—the people who knew your old identity, who have to pick up the pieces and miss out on getting to know who you are now, and the people who know your new identity, who you have to hide your origins from.

Out of those thoughts came the story of Rose Quartz, basically. That isn't to say that I think the immigrant experience is at all like coming from an alien planet. [*Laughs.*] It's more about exploring the themes of moving to a new place, reinventing yourself, finding out who you are while hiding your history from your new friends.

One of the new characters who helps battle the Diamonds in "Change Your Mind" is Sunstone, a fusion of Steven and Garnet. They break the fourth wall with anti-bullying messages for the audience, a variety of "Don't try this at home! You can do it! Believe in yourself! Always do your best!" affirmations.

Miki Brewster [storyboard artist]: Sunstone was explained to me as a "cool" character from the nineties. I think the only imagery we had to start with was the "cool sun with sunglasses" that people used to draw all the time on homework and packaging. I pressed Rebecca for a silhouette to draw from, and she scribbled out the rest of Sunstone's body in five seconds and wrote "COOL" in big letters on the bottom. I pinned it up next to me while I was boarding the Sunstone section and used it as my guide.

During our first pitch of the episode, I mentioned that I wanted Sunstone to say, "Winners don't use drugs," since I used to see it on arcade machines all the time. With everyone else's help, that evolved into Sunstone becoming an after school-special kind of character. They'd do a kickflip, then tell you to recycle and stay in school.

Lamar Abrams [storyboard artist]: In my head I always heard Sunstone's voice as the Kool Aid Man's—or Miki's voice, since she pitched it.

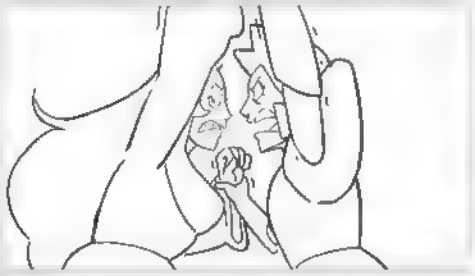
Obsidian also made her debut in this final extended episode of season five. The fusion of Garnet, Amethyst, Pearl, and Steven, Obsidian is the largest, fiercest fusion formed by the heroes in the series. A visual connection is made to the Crystal Temple back in Beach City, and why it is formed as it is: Obsidian herself is the mysterious figure embedded in the rock around the temple and partially submerged beneath the sand and ocean, a clue seeded back in the very first episode.

Steven Sugar [lead background designer]: I remember talking early on about Obsidian summoning her sword. We knew from season one that she'd build the hilt and forge the blade herself. We had been thinking about it when we planted the sword in the ocean in "Bubble Buddies" [S1E7] and "Ocean Gem" [S1E26], and after all those years we finally got it in!

1053-162H - Part 01

1053-162H "Change Your Mind" Part 01 | Page 330

Scene 139 | Panel 2



Dialog
YELLOW DIAMOND: when she ABANDONED us!

Action Notes
BD & YD struggling against each other

Scene 140 | Panel 1

Dialog
YELLOW DIAMOND: I alone was there for you and you would use your power against me?! <pushing through wall effort>

ALT: I was there for you! But you protect here and attack me?! <pushing through wall effort>

Action Notes
YD & BD s arms trembin as they try to overpower each other

1053-162H - Part 01

1053-162H - Part 01

CARTOON NETWORK STUDIOS - STEVEN UNIVERSE

CN

1053-162H - Part 01

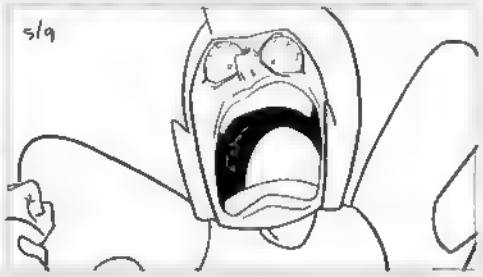
1053-162H "Change Your Mind" - Part 01 | Page 331

Scene 140 | Panel 2

Dialog
YELLOW DIAMOND: I alone was there for you and you would use your power against me?! <pushing through wall effort>

ALT: I was there for you! But you protect here and attack me?! <pushing through wall effort>

Scene 140 | Panel 1



Dialog
YELLOW DIAMOND: I alone was there for you and you would use your power against me?! <pushing through wall effort>

ALT: I was there for you! But you protect here and attack [illegible]! <pushing through wall effort>

1053-162H - Part 01

1053-162H - Part 01

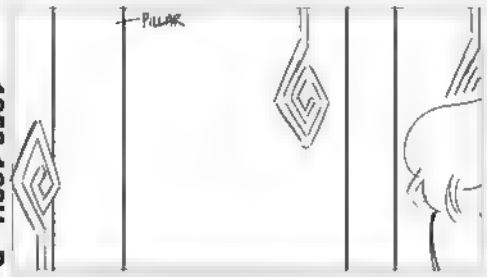
CARTOON NETWORK STUDIOS - STEVEN UNIVERSE

CN

1053-162H - Part 01

1053-162H "Change Your Mind" - Part 01 | Page 332

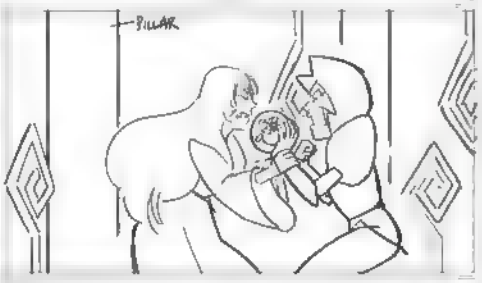
Scene 141 | Panel 1



Dialog
YELLOW DIAMOND: I alone was there for you and you would use your power against me?! <pushing through wall effort>

ALT: I was there for you! But you protect here and attack me?! <pushing through wall effort>

Scene 141 | Panel 2

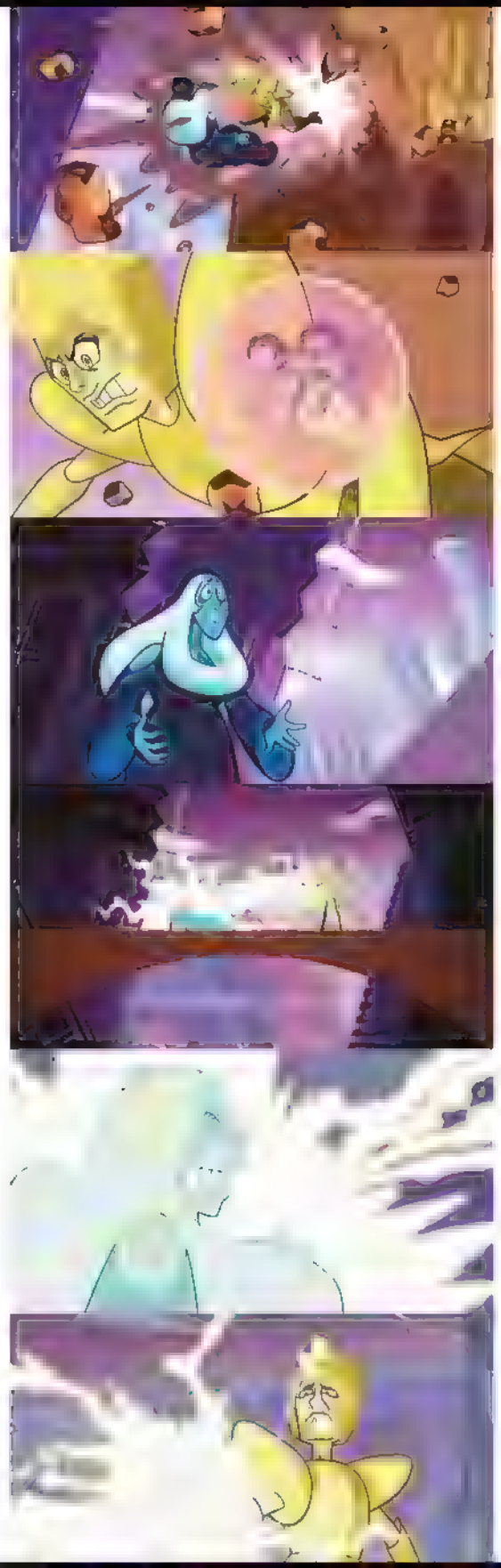


Dialog
YELLOW DIAMOND: I alone was there for you and you would use your power against me?! <pushing through wall effort>

ALT: I was there for you! But you protect [illegible] and attack [illegible]! <pushing through wall effort>

1053-162H - Part 01

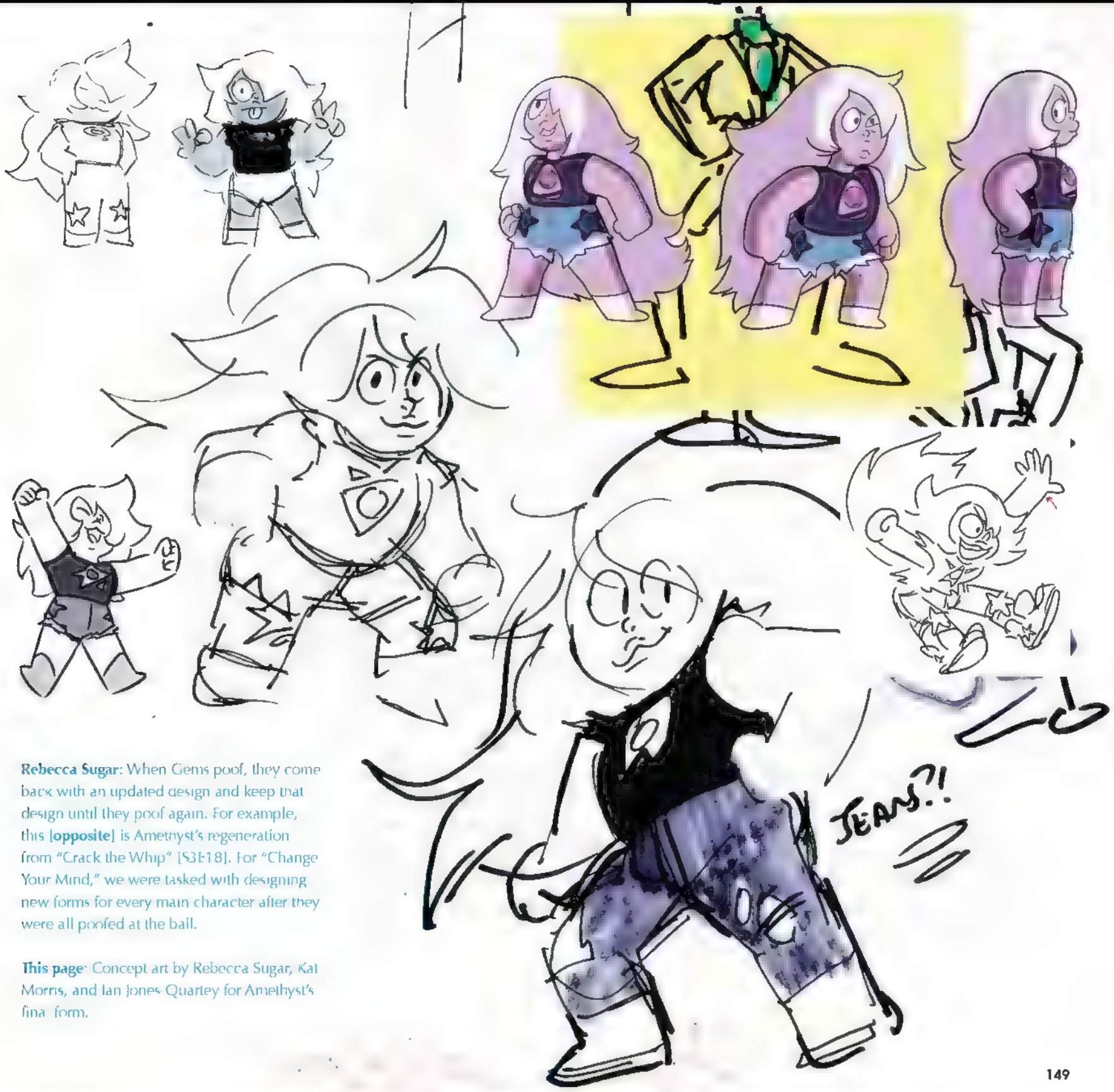
1053-162H - Part 01



Opposite: Blue and Yellow Diamond's confrontation in storyboards by Paul Villeco and stills

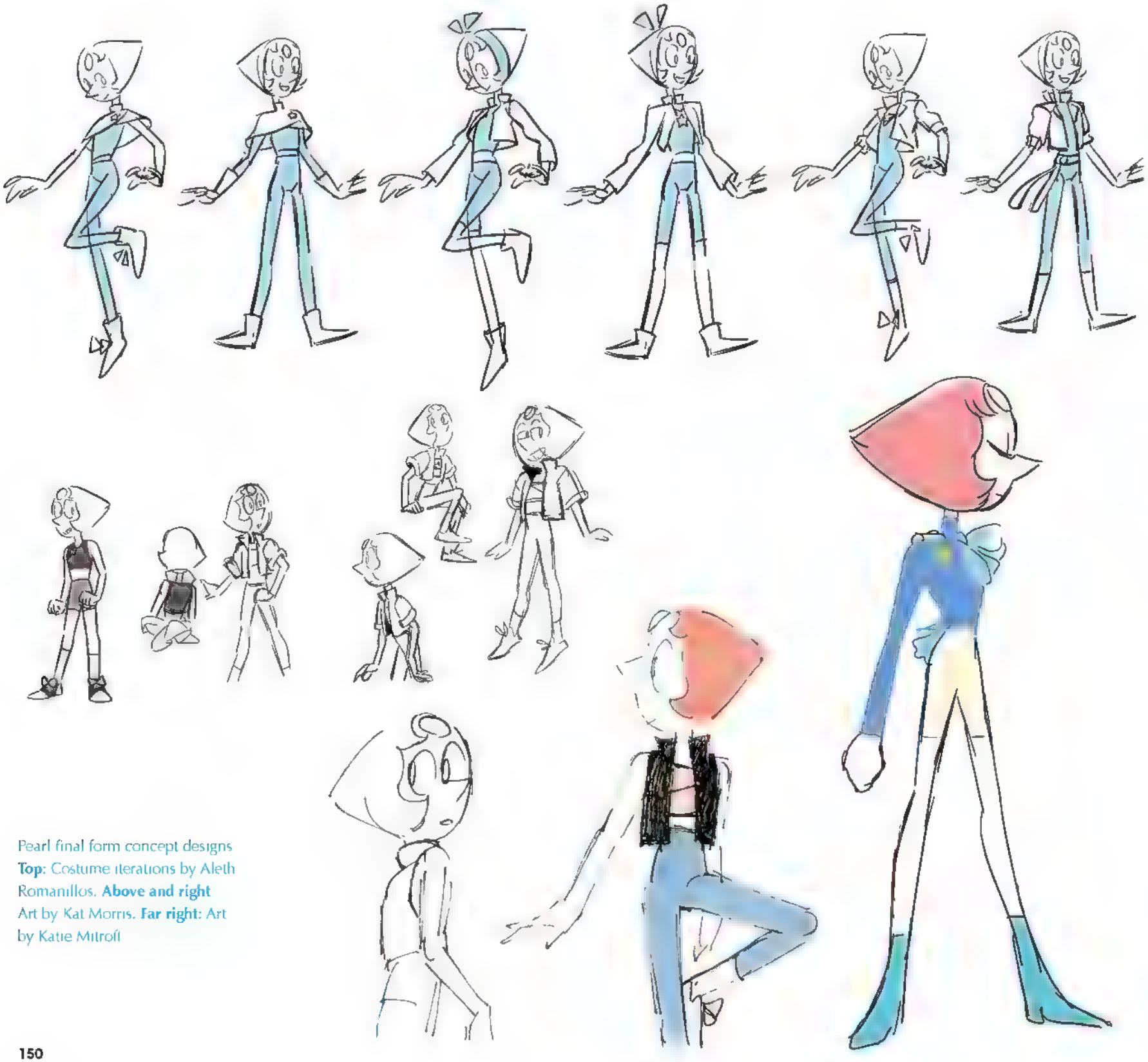
Above: Concept art by Joe Johnston.

AMETHYST III
LONG HAIR EDITION
DONE WAITING
READY TO BE ME



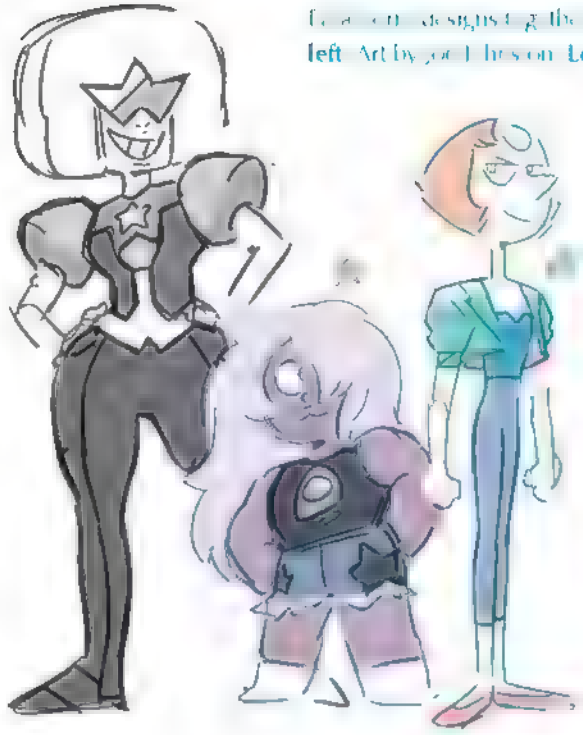
Rebecca Sugar: When Gems poof, they come back with an updated design and keep that design until they poof again. For example, this **[opposite]** is Amethyst's regeneration from "Crack the Whip" [S3E18]. For "Change Your Mind," we were tasked with designing new forms for every main character after they were all poofed at the ball.

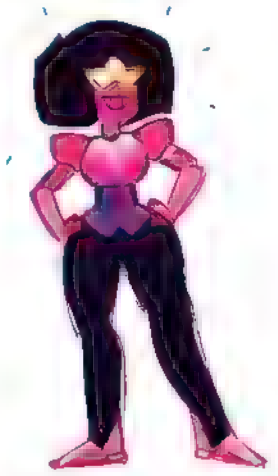
This page: Concept art by Rebecca Sugar, Kat Morris, and Ian Jones-Quartey for Amethyst's final form.



Pearl final form concept designs **Top:** Costume iterations by Aleth Romanillos. **Above and right** Art by Kat Morris. **Far right:** Art by Katie Mitroff

Garnet concept designs. Gallery of early, pre-production sketches. **Far top left** Art by Joe Johnston. **Left and below** Art by Rebecca Sugar.

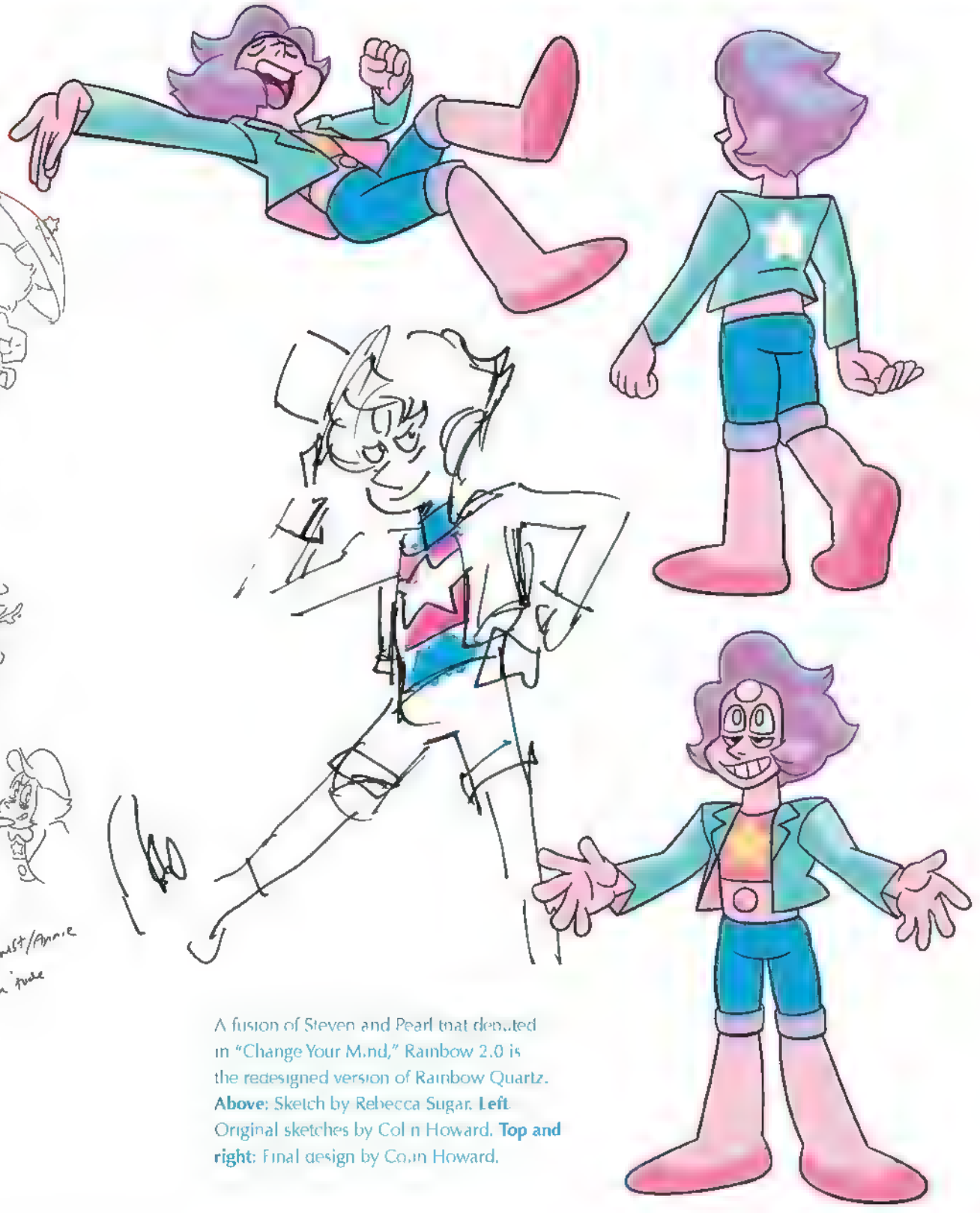




Rebecca Sugar's sketches exploring the final form designs for the main Gem characters.

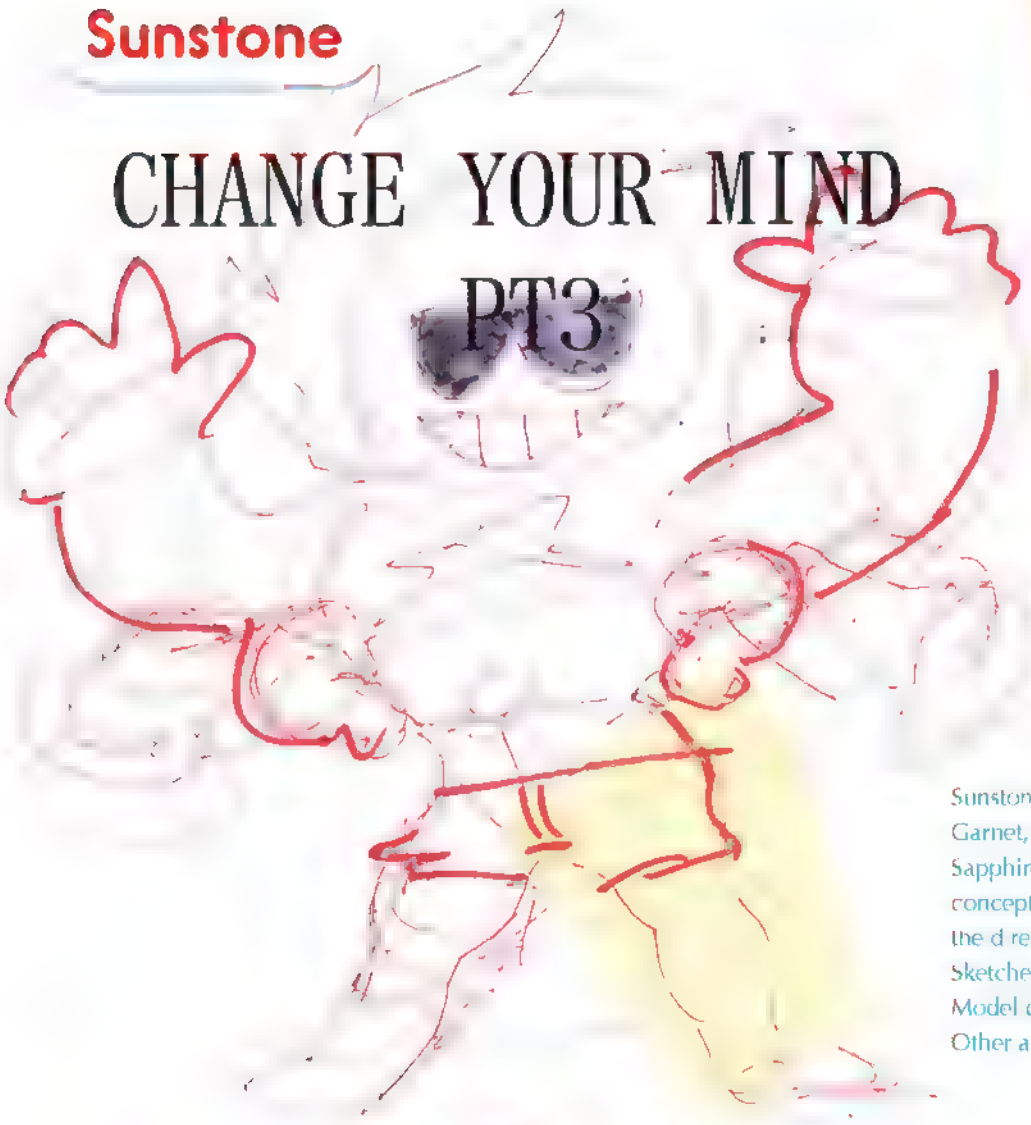
Opposite left Story thumbnails by Kat Morris and Rebecca Sugar. **Opposite top right** Art by Katie Mitchell. **Opposite bottom right** Art by Rebecca Sugar. **Above left** Art by Katie Mitchell. **Above** Art by Rebecca Sugar.

Rainbow 2.0

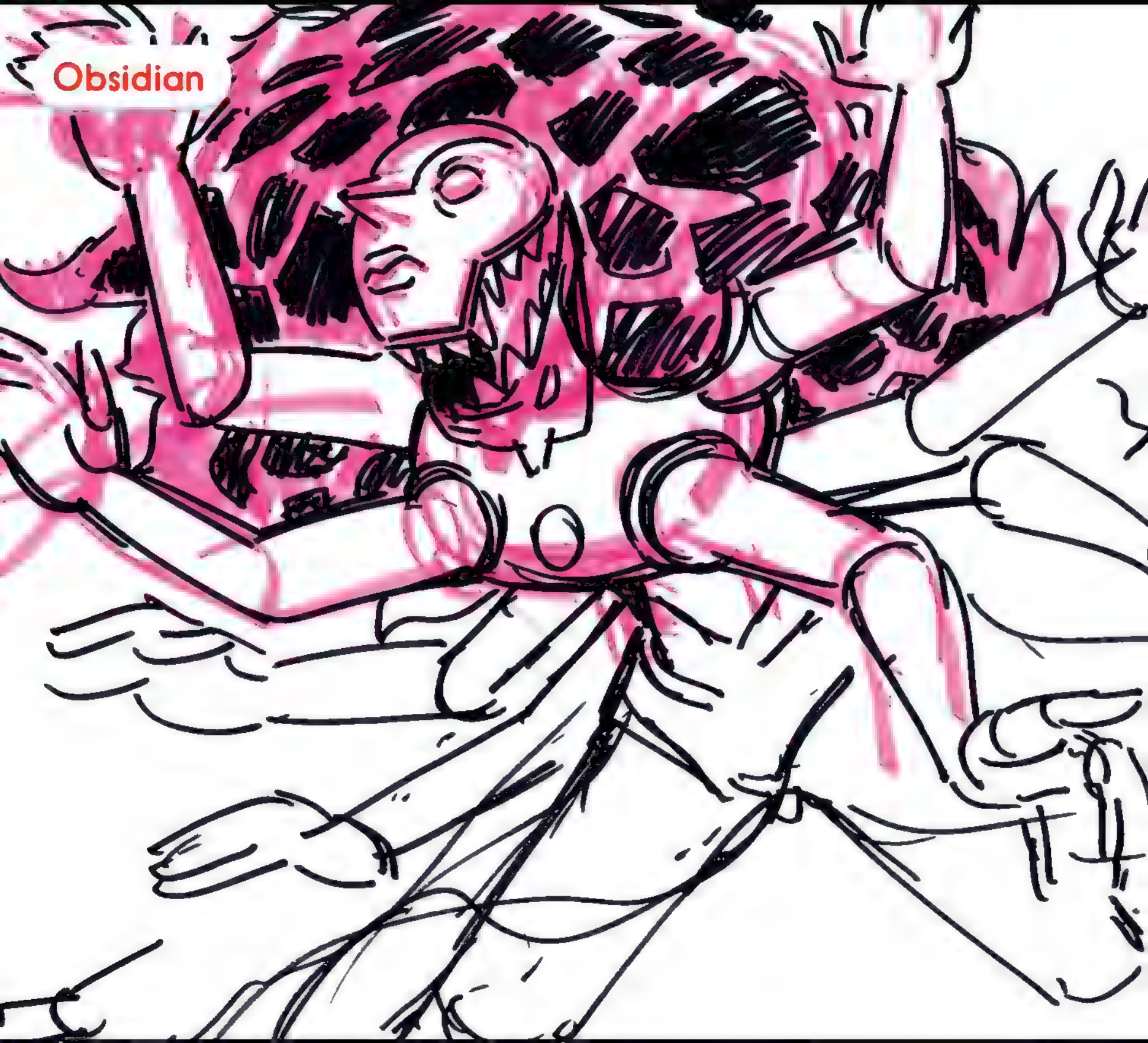


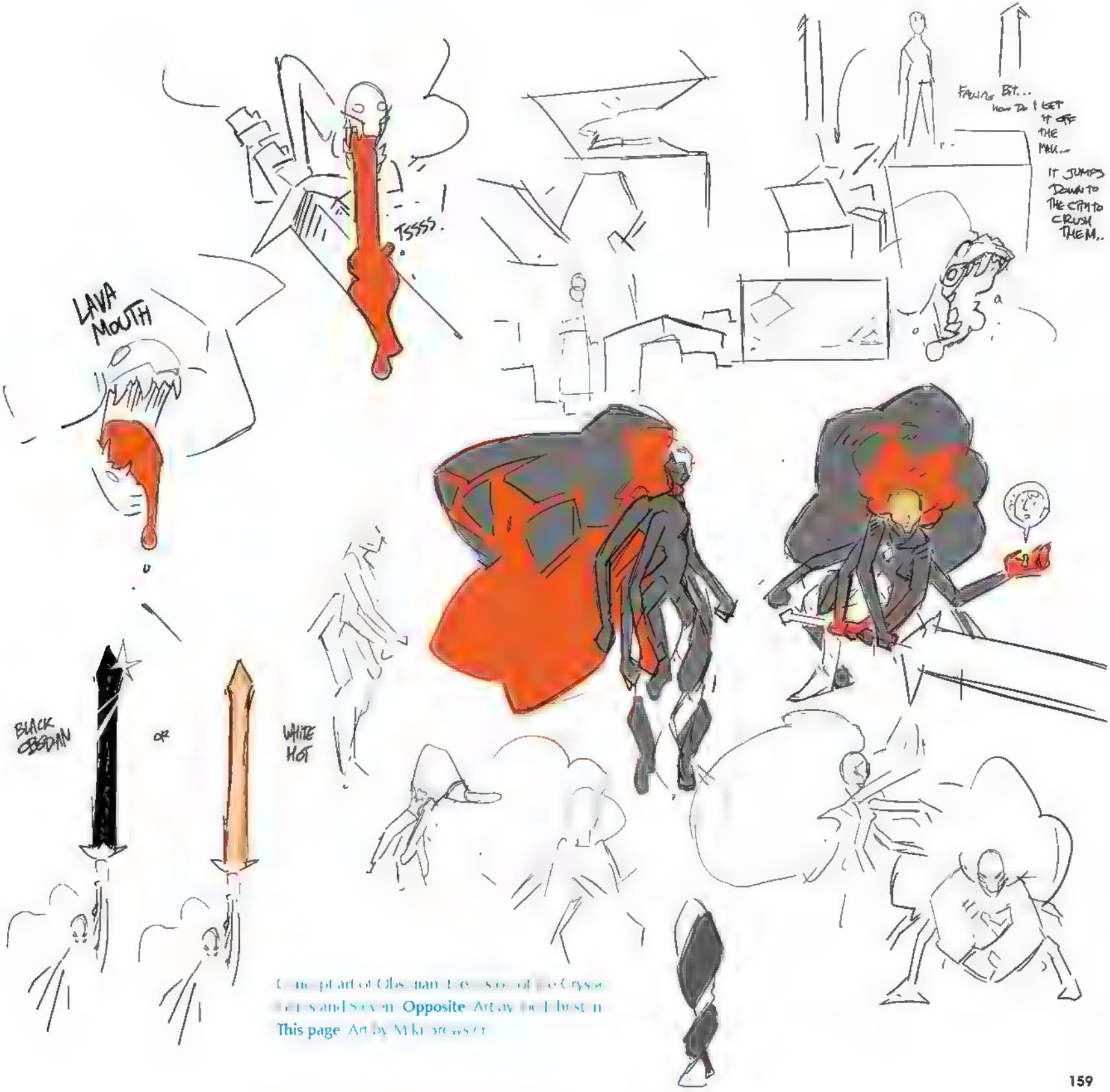
A fusion of Steven and Pearl that debuted in "Change Your Mind," Rainbow 2.0 is the redesigned version of Rainbow Quartz. **Above**: Sketch by Rebecca Sugar. **Left**: Original sketches by Colin Howard. **Top and right**: Final design by Colin Howard.

Sunstone



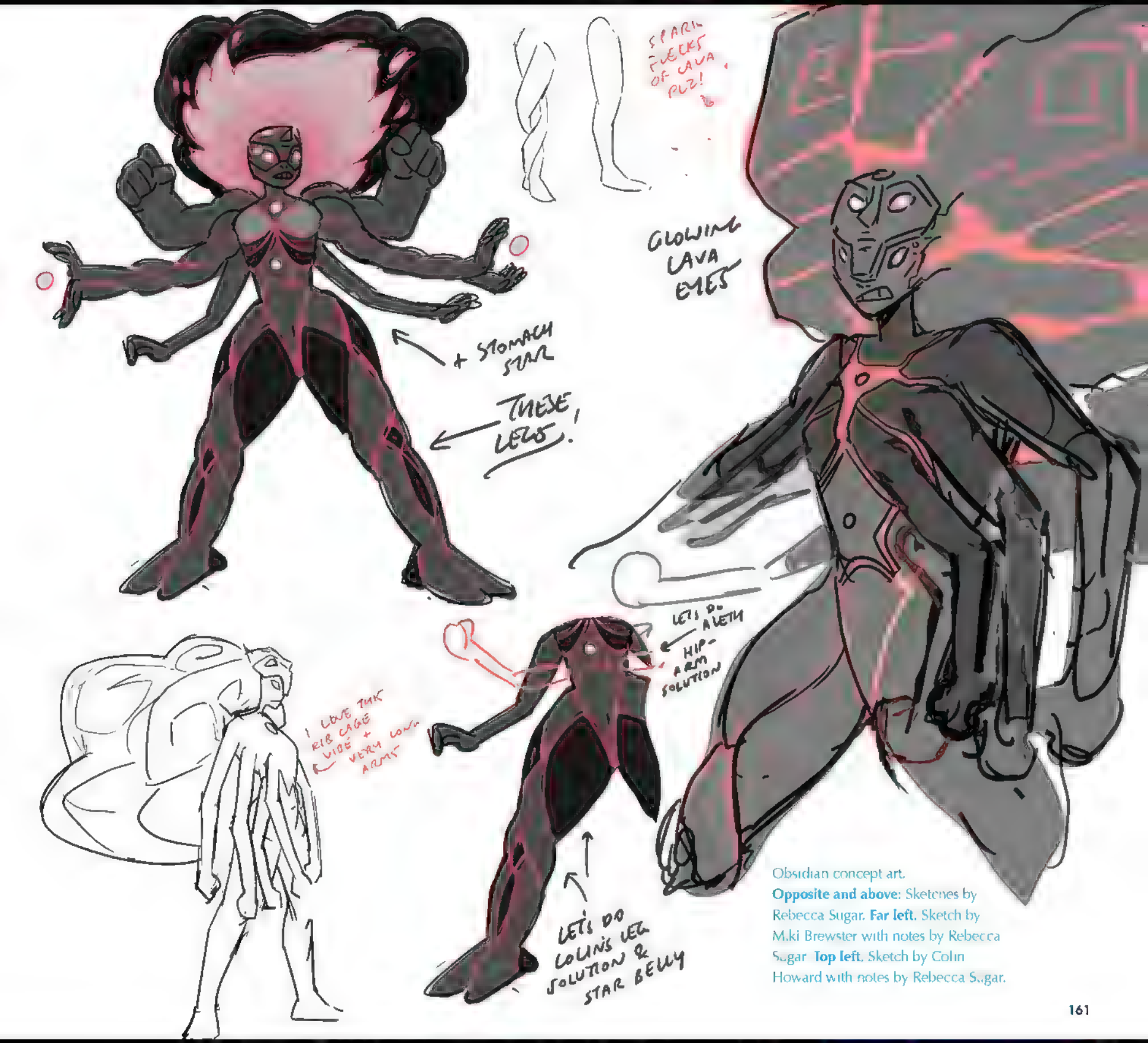
Sunstone is the fusion of Steven and Garnet, (who is a fusion of Ruby and Sapphire). **Left.** The original Sunstone concept sketch by Rebecca Sugar with the direction, "COOL." **Above right.** Sketches by Miki Brewster. **Below left.** Model designs by Aleth Romanillos Other art by Rebecca Sugar


Obsidian



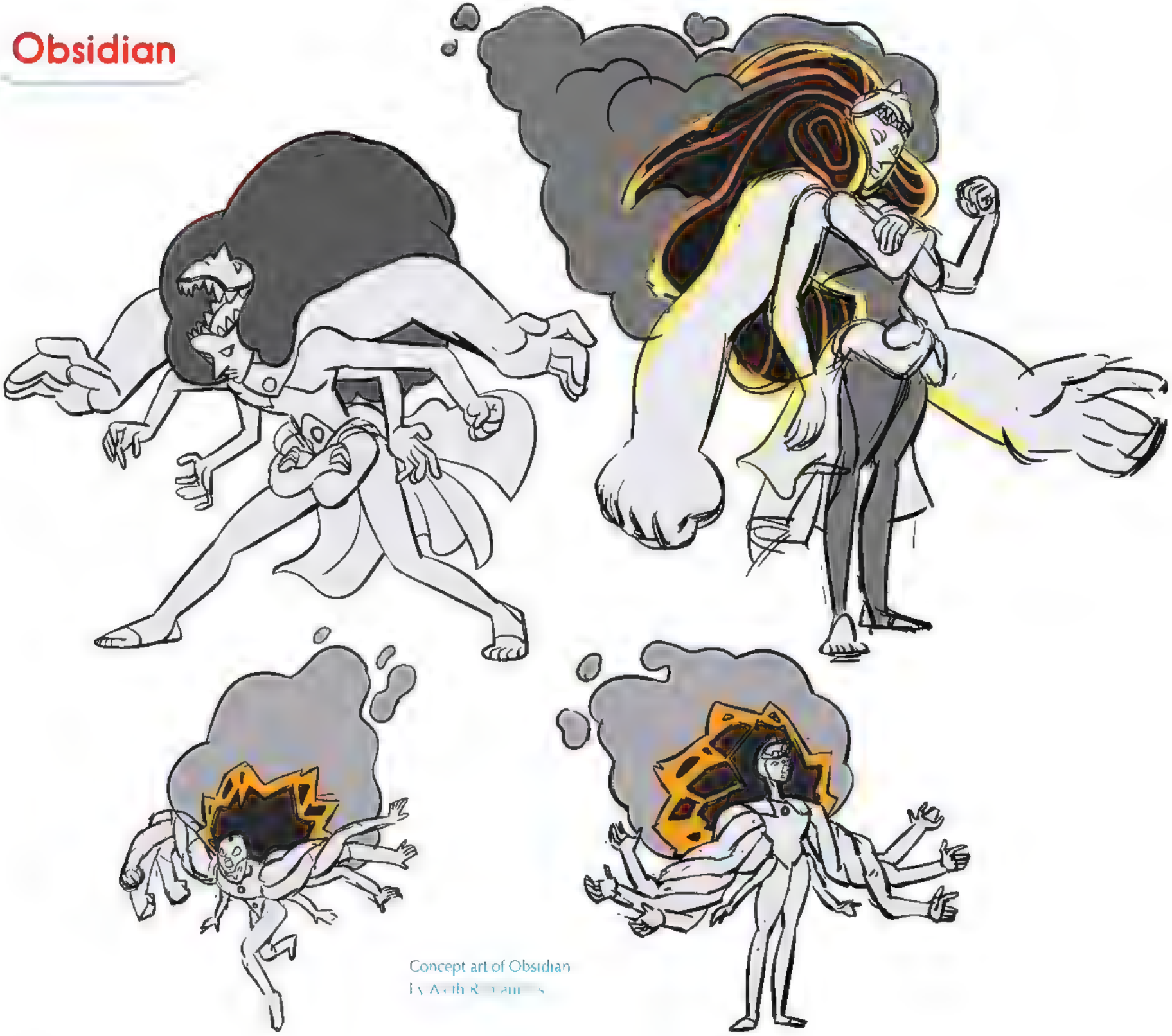
Concept art of Obsidian Eye socket and Ice Crystal Eyes and Seven **Opposite** Art by Jeff Brush
This page Art by Mike Mayhew

Obsidian


SPARK FLECKS OF LAVA PLZ!
GLOWING LAVA EYES
+ STOMACH STAR
THESE LEGS!
LET'S DO ALETH HIP-ARM SOLUTION
I LOVE THIK RIB CAGE VIBE + VERY LONG ARMS
LET'S DO COLIN'S LEG SOLUTION & STAR BELLY

Obsidian concept art. **Opposite and above:** Sketches by Rebecca Sugar. **Far left.** Sketch by Miki Brewster with notes by Rebecca Sugar. **Top left.** Sketch by Colin Howard with notes by Rebecca Sugar.

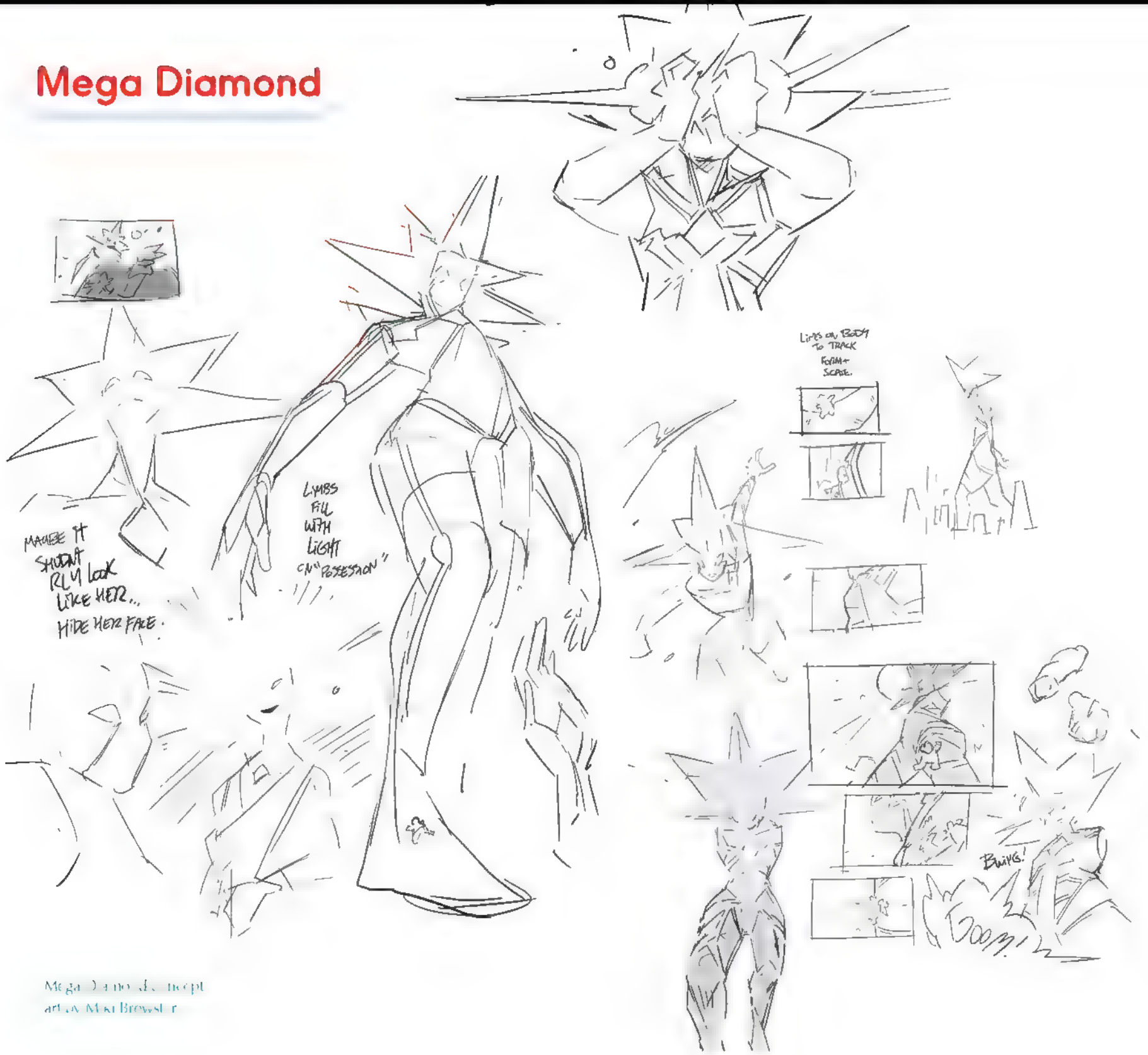
Obsidian



Concept art of Obsidian
by Arth[illegible]

Concept art of Obsidian by Joe Quesada and Sal Buscema for "Carpe Your Mind"

Mega Diamond



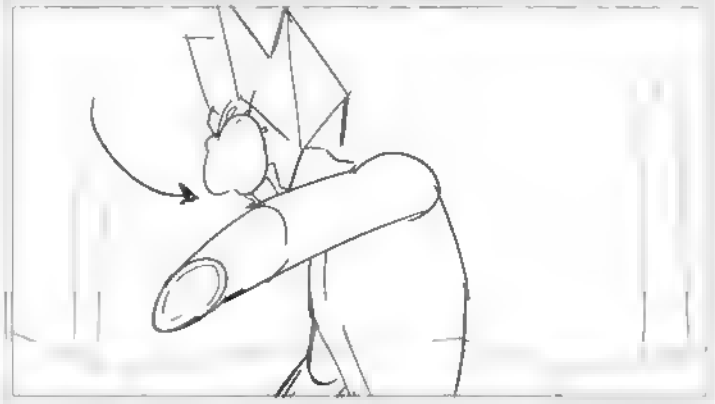
Mega Diamond concept art by Mel Brewster

"Change Your Mind" storyboards featuring Mega Diamond by Mik' Brewster

1053-162H "Change Your Mind" Part 03 1053-162H "Change Your Mind" Part 03 Page 270

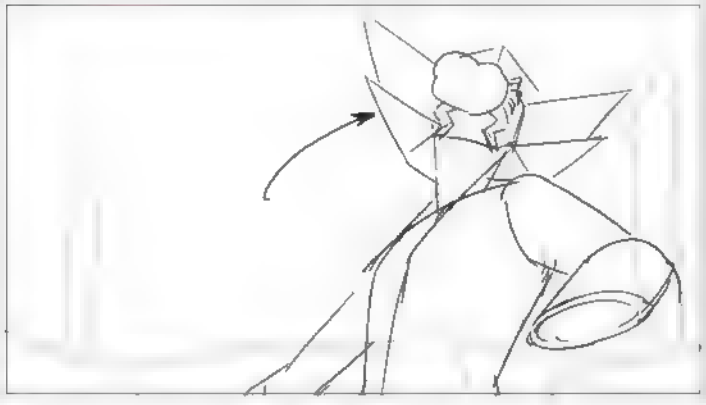
Scene	Panel
078	1

Scene	Panel
078	2

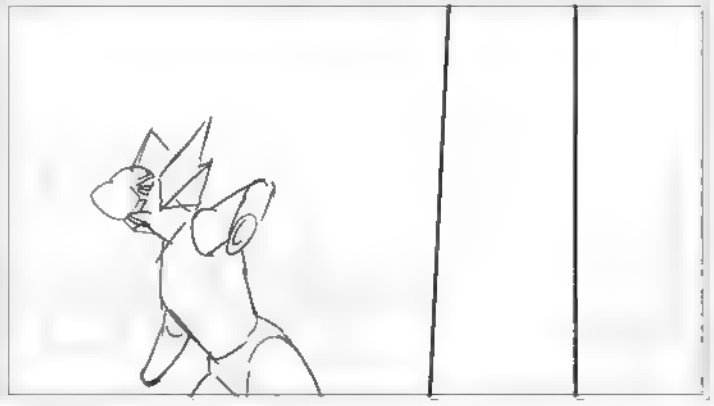


1053-162H "Change Your Mind" Part 03 1053-162H "Change Your Mind" Part 03 Page 271

Scene	Panel
078	3



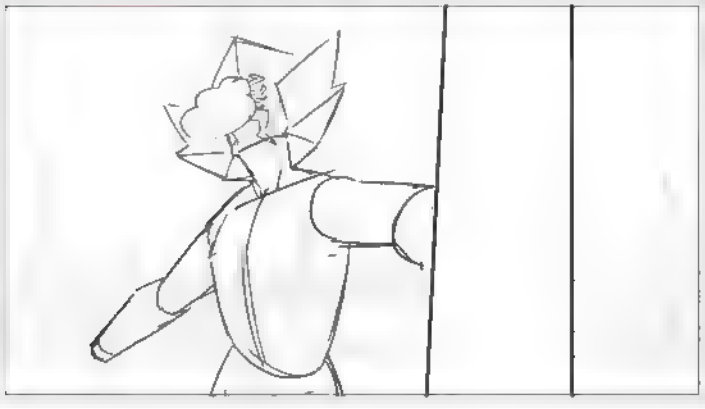
Scene	Panel
079	1



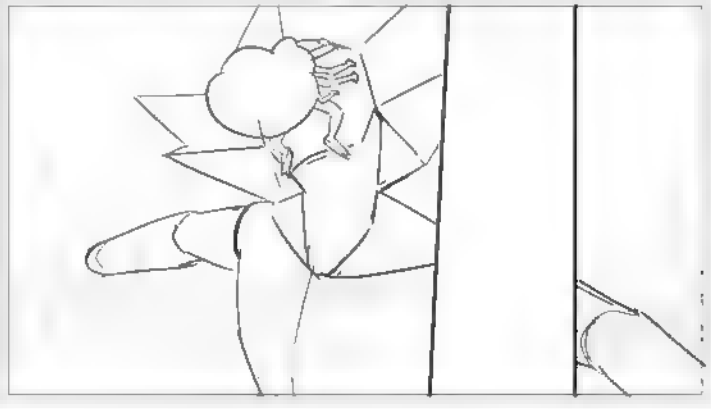
Action Notes
Reuse BG from Obsidian jump pan.

1053-162H "Change Your Mind" Part 03 1053-162H "Change Your Mind" Part 03 Page 272

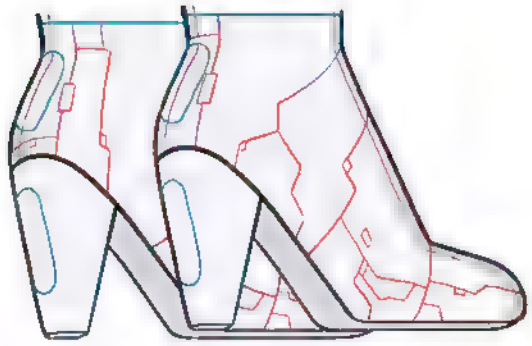
Scene	Panel
079	2



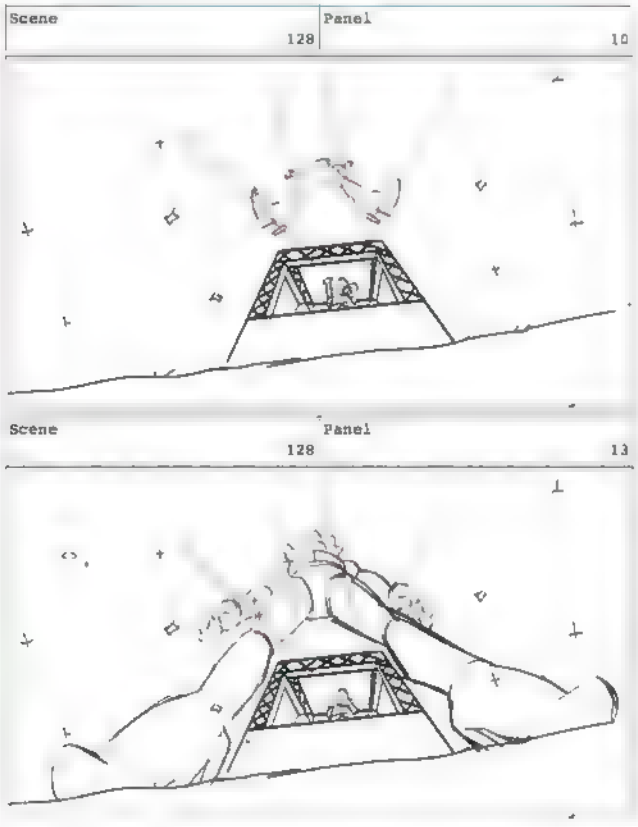
Scene	Panel
079	3

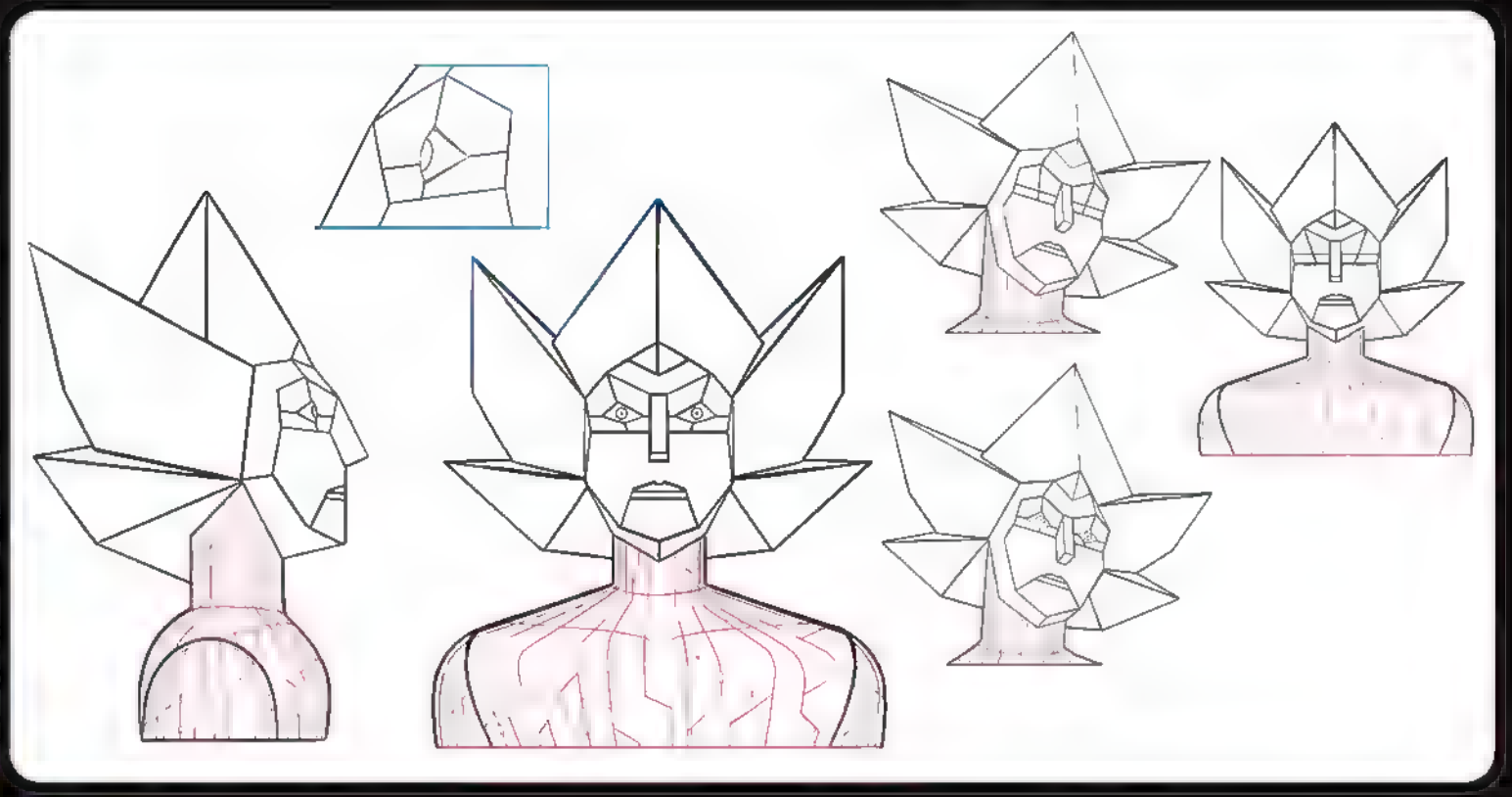


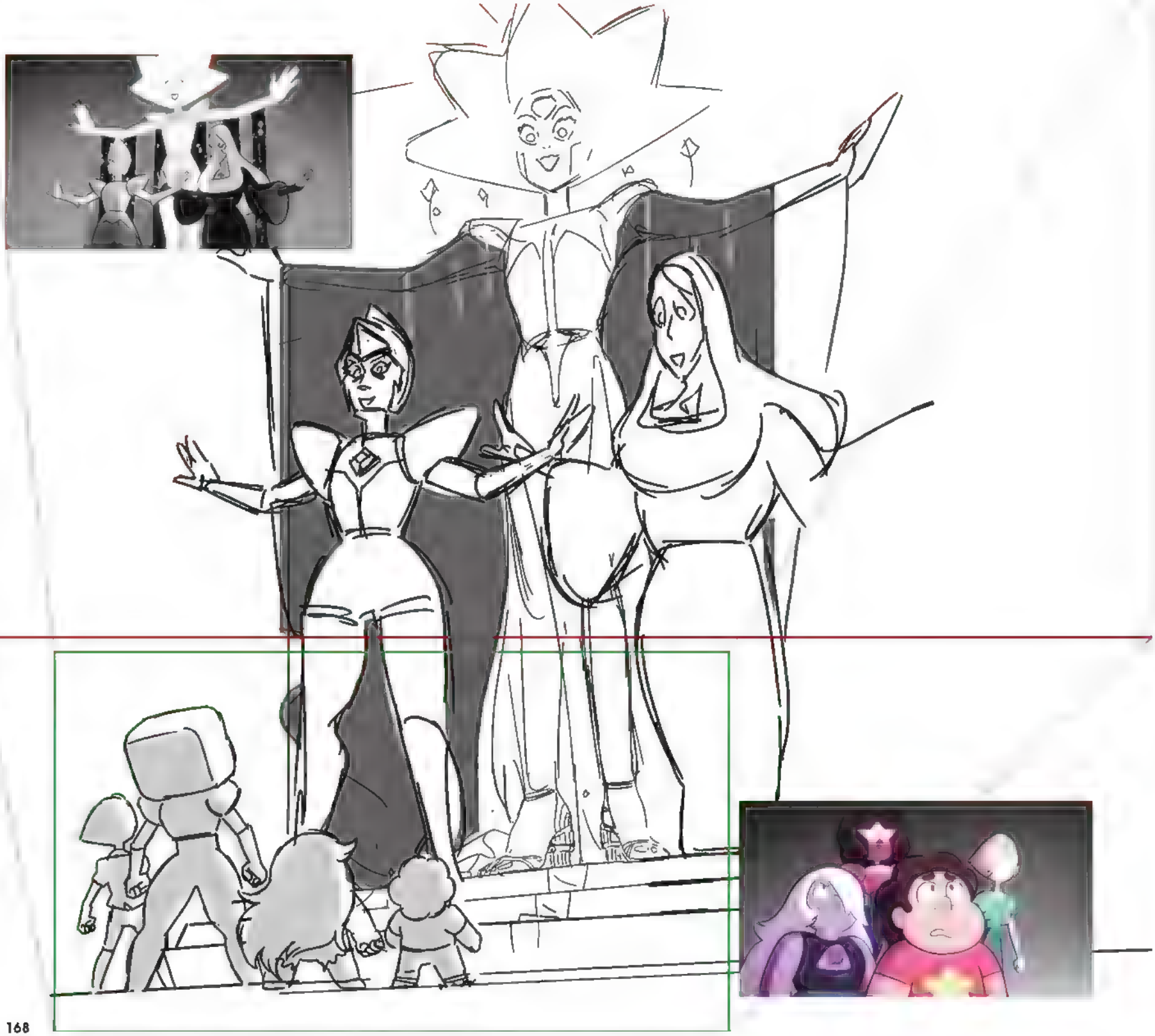
Mega Diamond



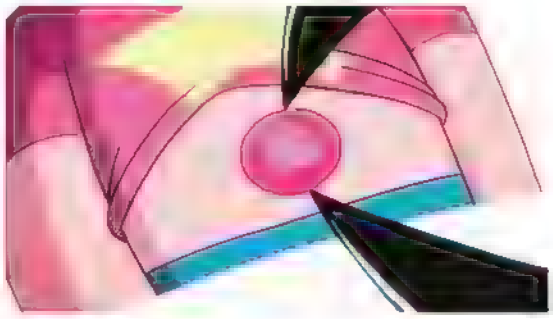
Mega Diamond model by Angie Wang
Storyboard panels by Danny Cragg

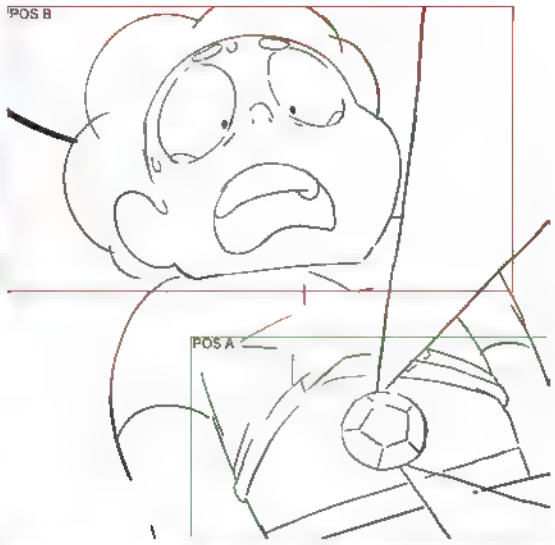


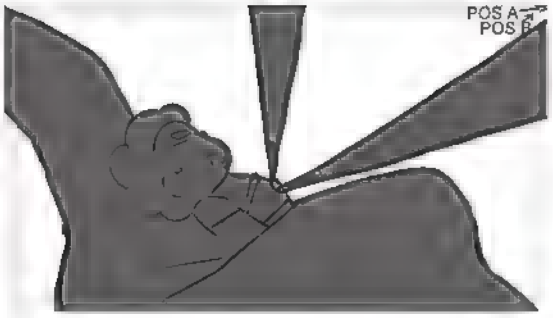


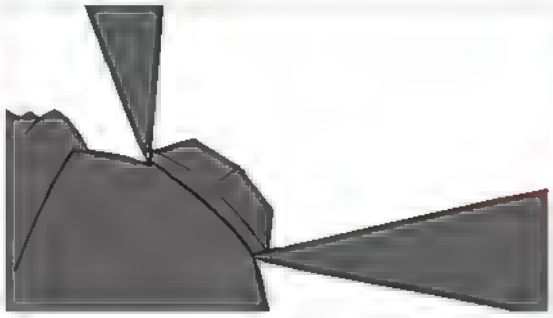


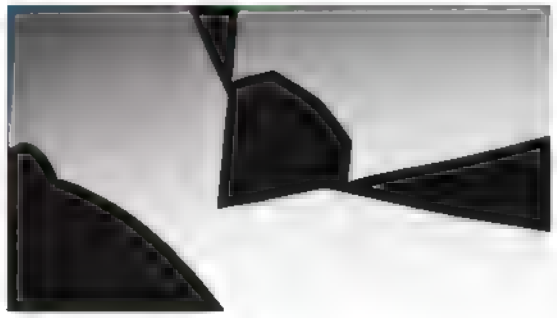
White Diamond towers over the crystal Gems in this storyboard sketch and stills. **Opposite** Storyboards by Joe Johnston. **Left** Storyboard sketch by Ian Jual and Rebecca Sugar. **Above and overleaf** The climactic battle at the end of the series is storyboarded and stills. White Diamond exhausts Steven's gem. Storyboards by Ian Jual and Rebecca Sugar.

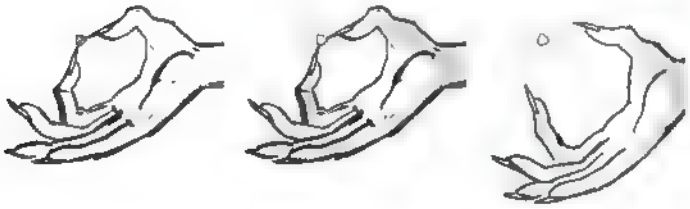


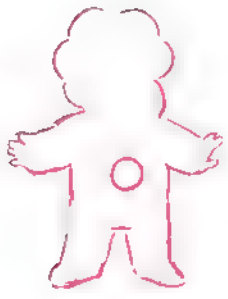

POS B
POS A

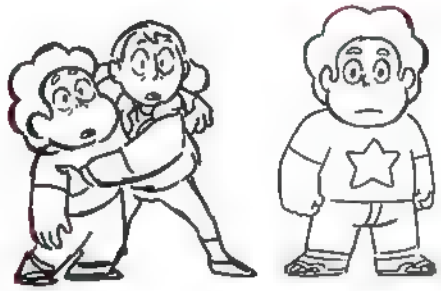

POS A
POS B



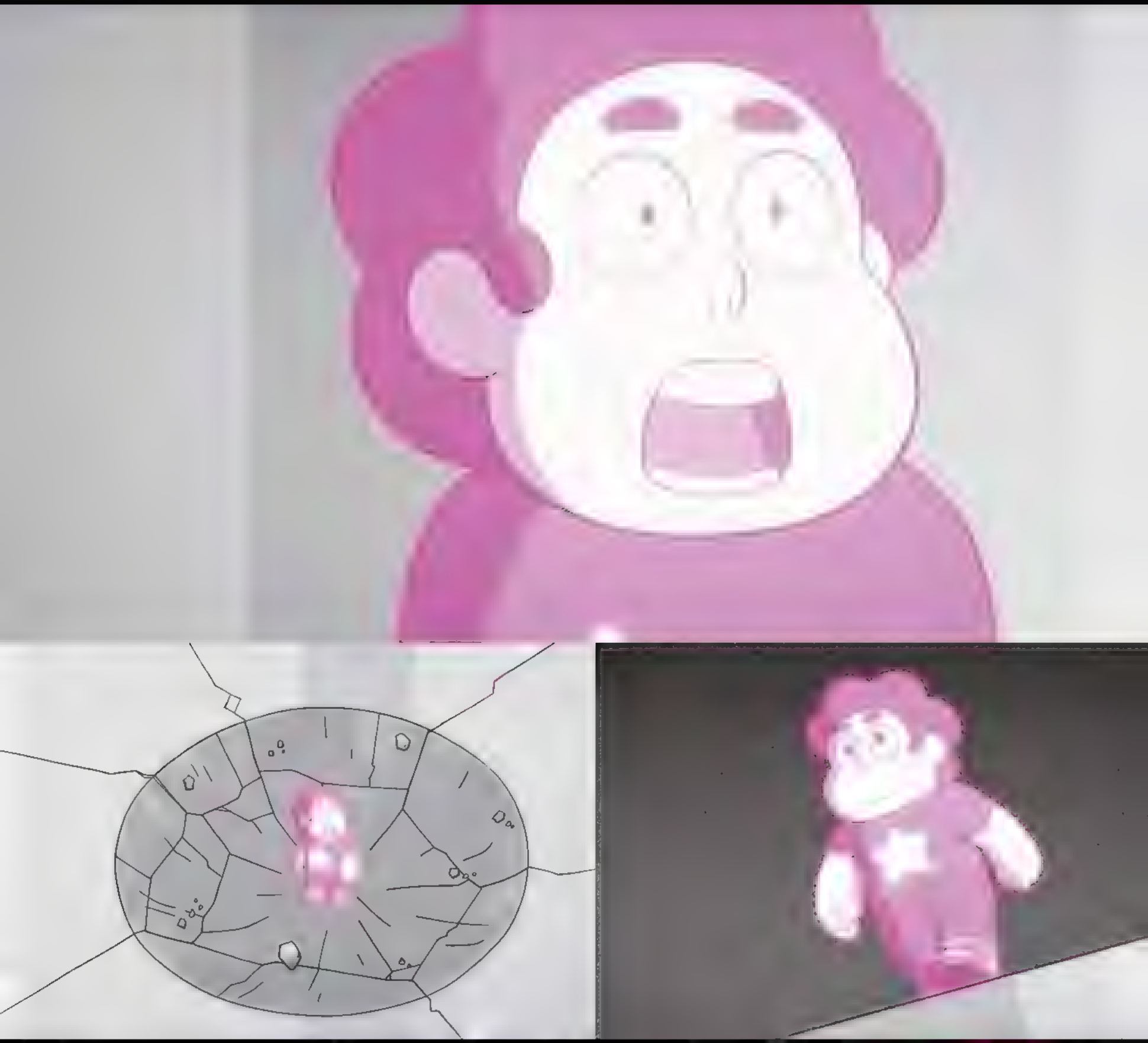


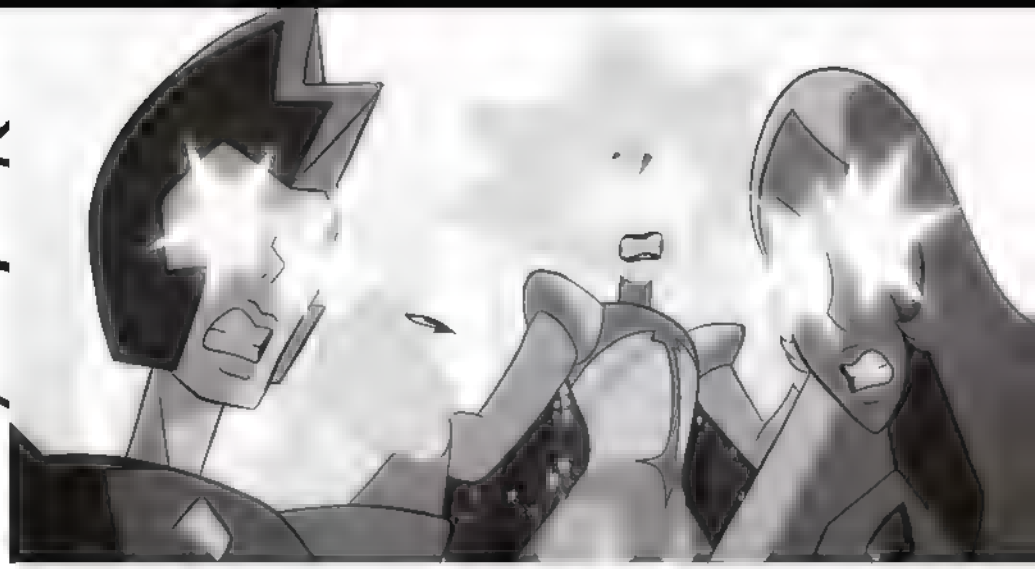


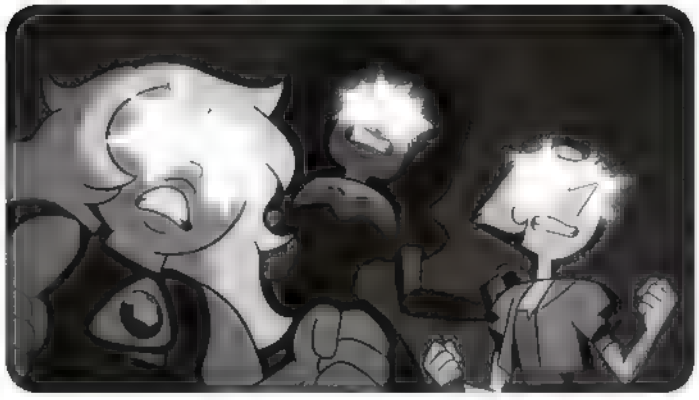


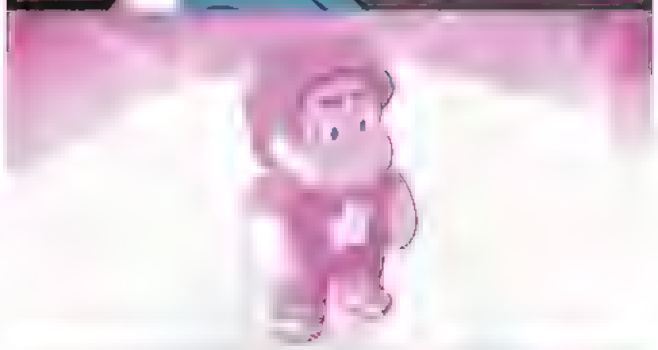


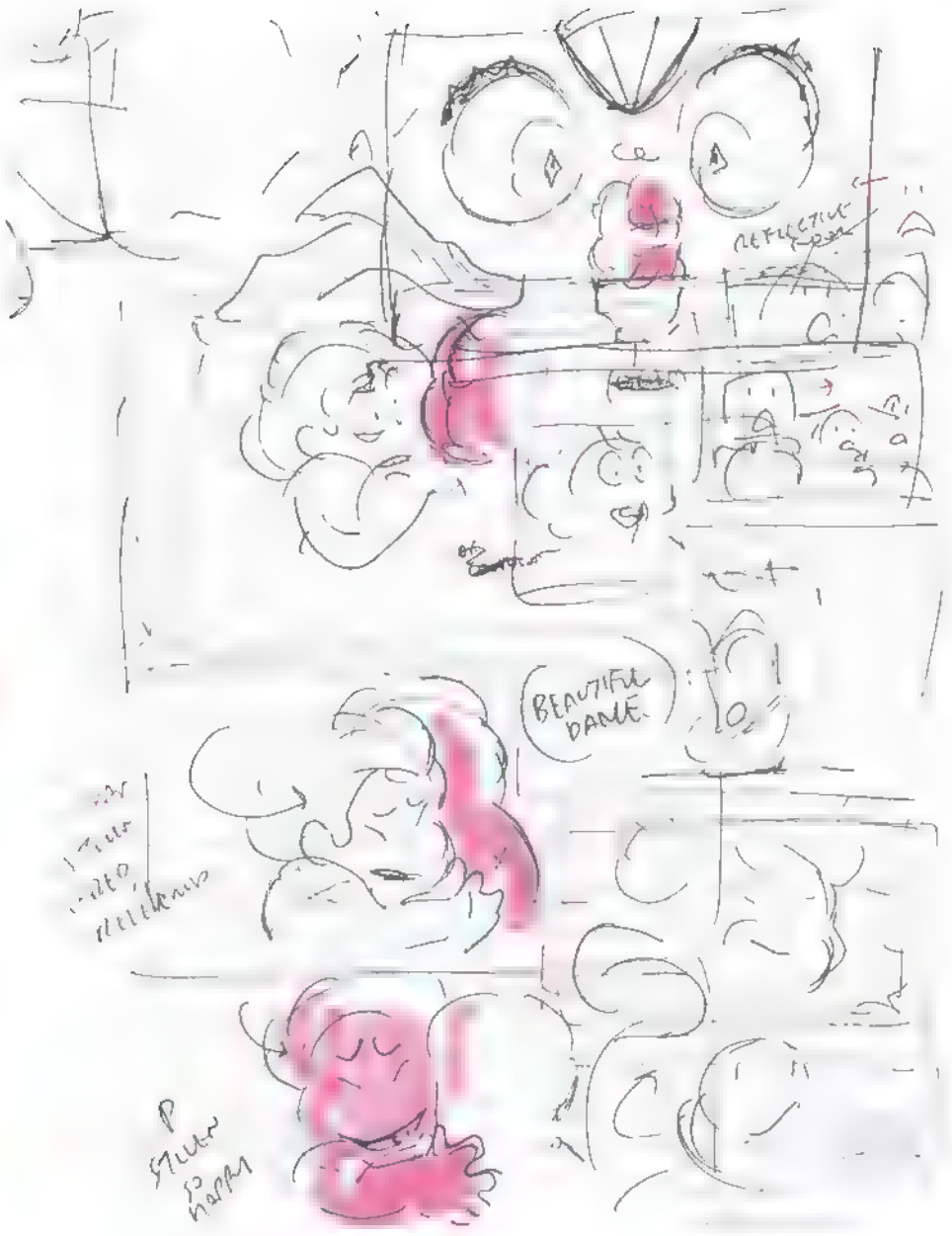
DETAIL











Above right Rough story sketches by Steven Universe creator Rebecca Sugar. **Right** Story sketches and drawings by Kat Morris.

James Baxter Animation

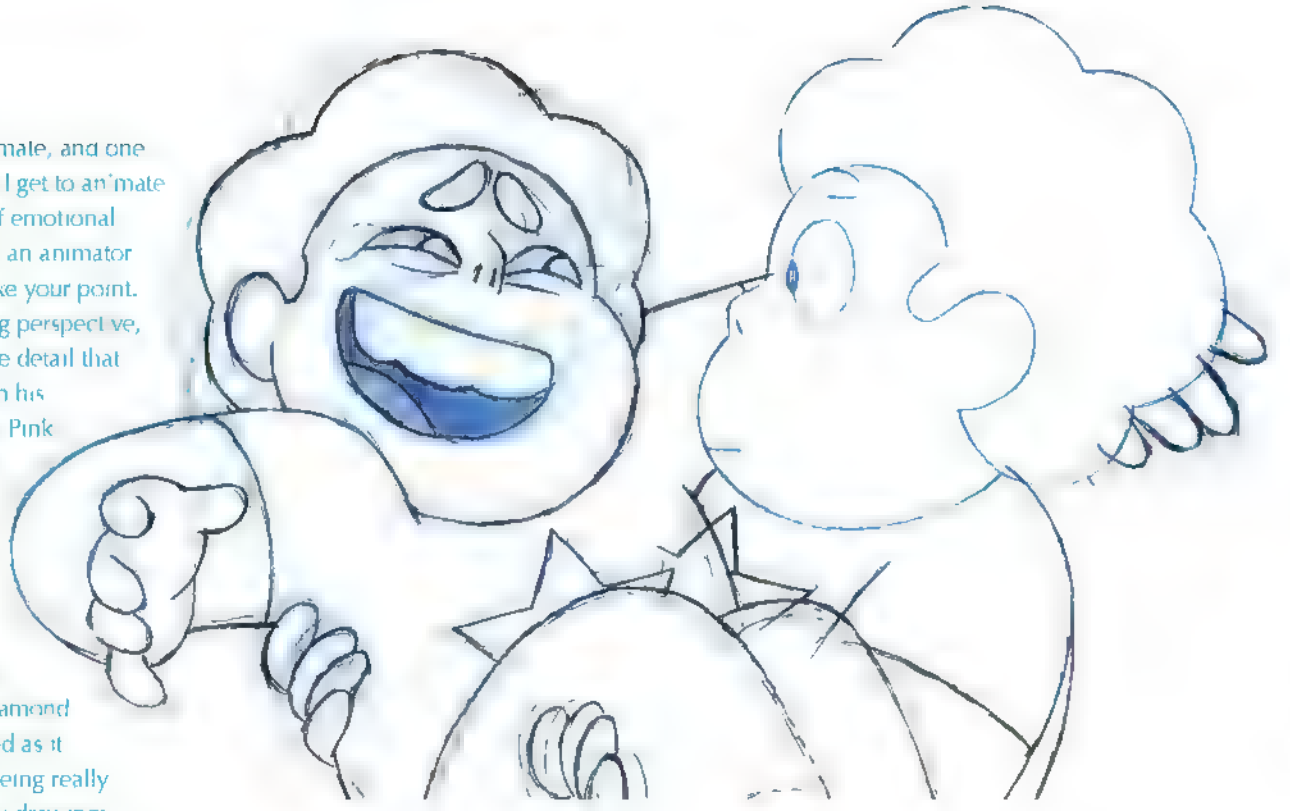
James Baxter [animator]: We were a l fans of the show in my family, my daughter Margaret especially. I reached out to Rebecca with the help of a mutual friend at Cartoon Network to tell her how much we loved the show, and she very kindly offered to do my daughter a drawing of Steven and Rose. Rebecca and Ian [Jones-Quartey] even came to her birthday party to deliver the drawing. We were so surprised and grateful to Rebecca for doing that – it really made Margaret's birthday incredibly special. Anyway, I said to Rebecca that if there was ever any way for me to return the favor to please let me know. Rebecca eventually reached out to me and asked if I would do a little animation for the "Change Your Mind" episode.

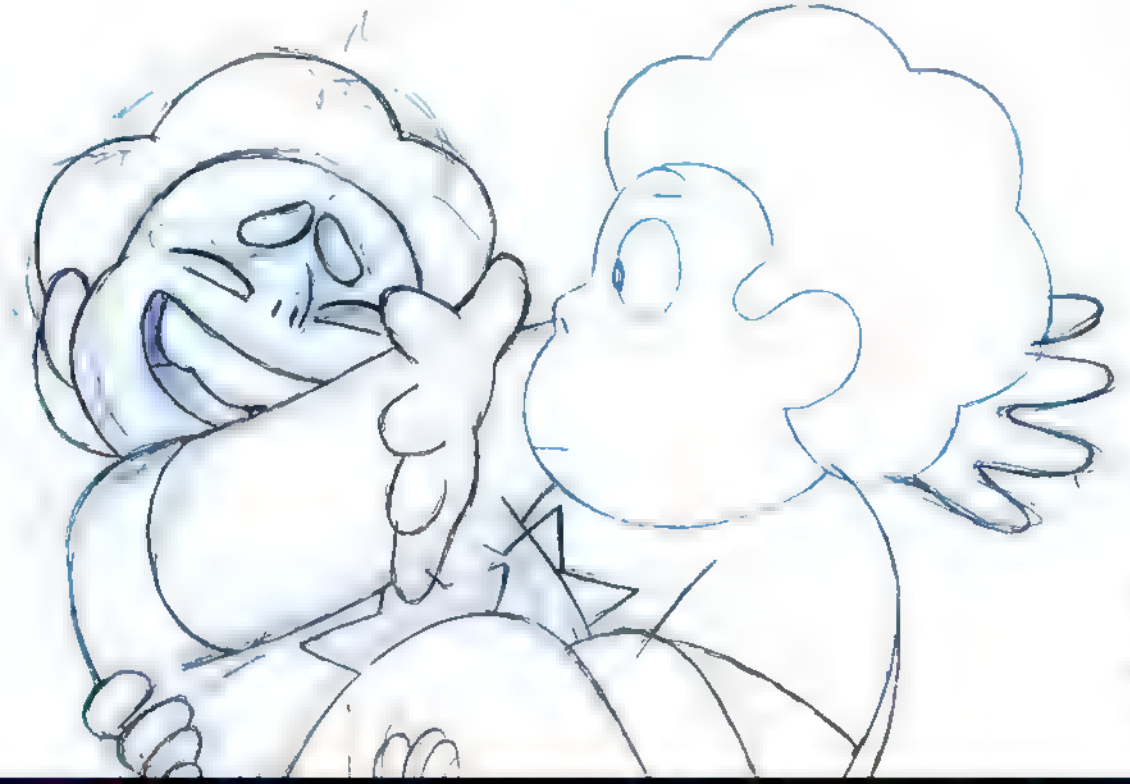
Rebecca explained to me the moment in the story and pitched that part of the storyboard to me. She said it needed to be a meaningful scene, and that she would love it if I could give it the full treatment, go all out and make it as beautiful as I could. This was actually quite early in the episode's production, before the episode had been shipped overseas for animation, et cetera. Usually on *Steven*, the background layouts are done by the overseas studio based on the storyboards, so there were no layouts ready for me to animate to. Fortunately, the backgrounds were not that complicated for the four shots that I animated, so I just animated without backgrounds and relied on the layout artists to fill them in later.

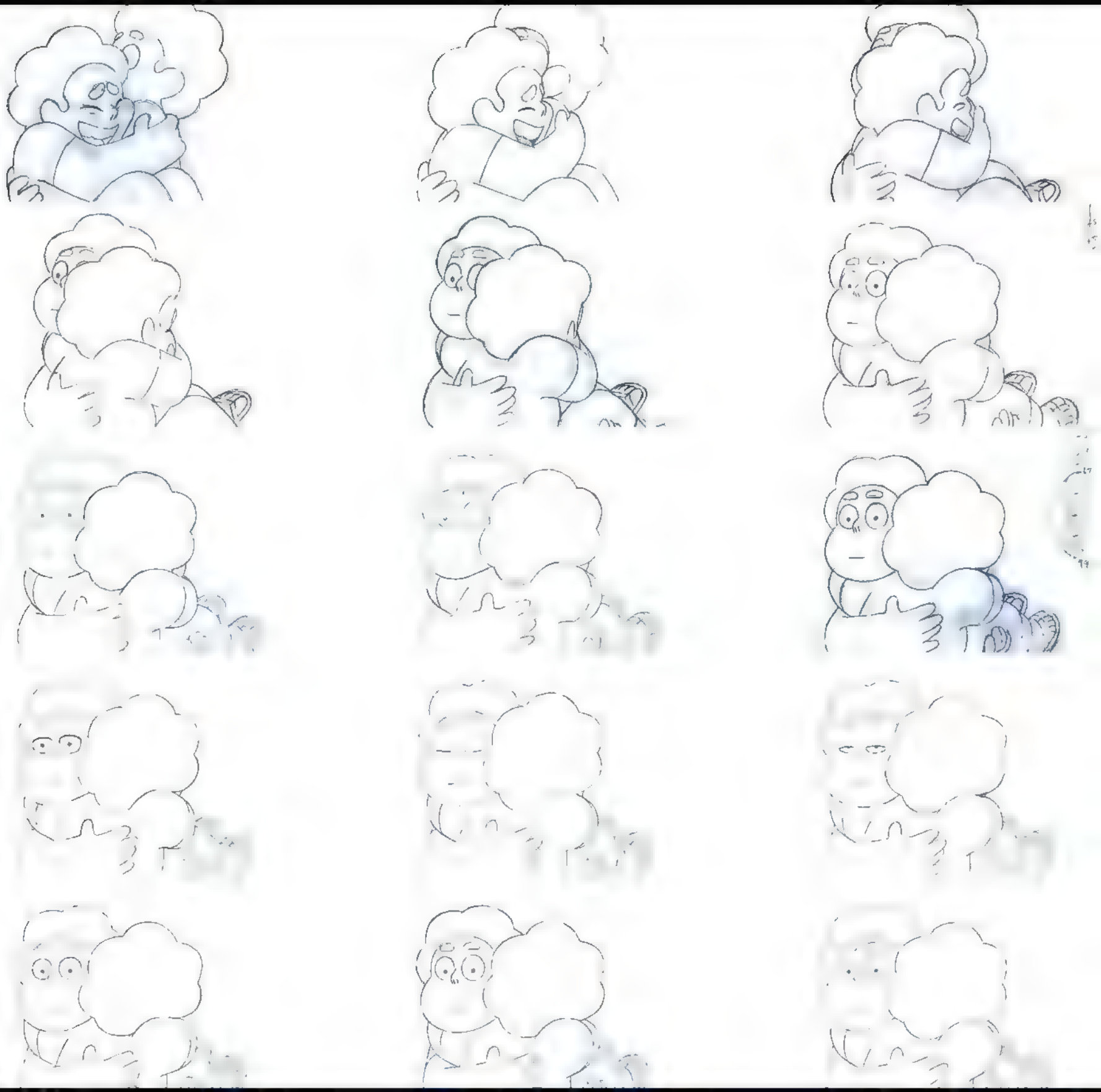
It was a lot of fun for me to animate, and one of the rare chances these days that I get to animate on paper. The audience has a lot of emotional history with these characters, so as an animator you don't have to go too far to make your point. I kept it fairly simple from an acting perspective, although I was careful to put in one detail that Rebecca had mentioned: Steven (in his weakened state) putting his feet on Pink Steven's feet as they dance around in the manner of a kid learning how to dance from an adult. On the technical side there were a couple of fun things for me. Turning Steven's graphic hair shapes around was fun, and doing the camera rotation with White Diamond was also fun. It's not as complicated as it looks, really—it's just a matter of being really careful about the solidity of the key drawings, and spacing the in-betweens just right to give the illusion of three-dimensional space.

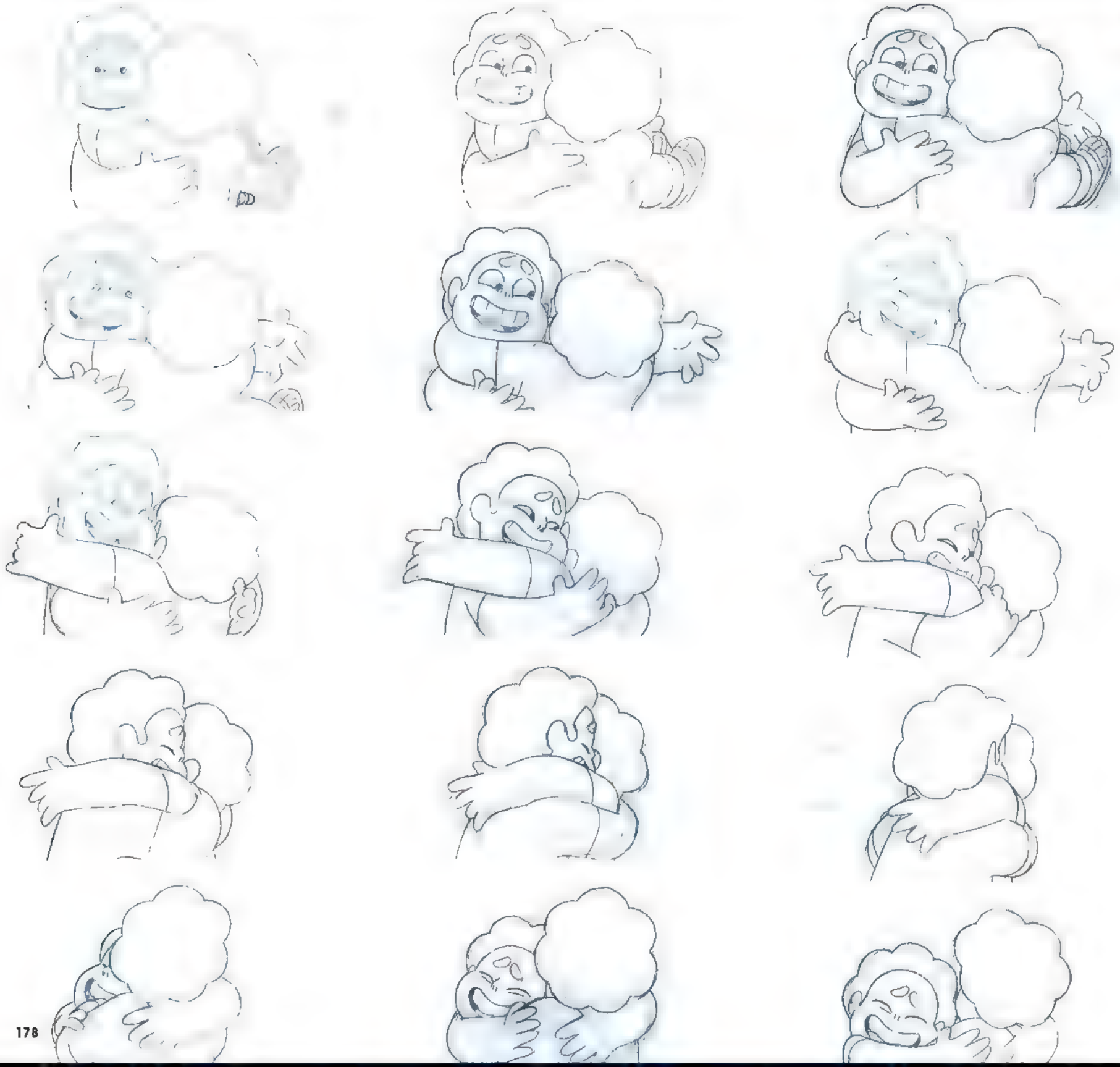
Because the placement of the drawings is so critical in making this kind of animation work, my wife, Kendra, with whom I've worked for many years and who understands this stuff better than anyone, did a tie-down pass [a term for a cleanup pass] over my rough drawings. This was to make them more accurate and fill in all the in-betweens before they got shipped overseas to be inked and colored.

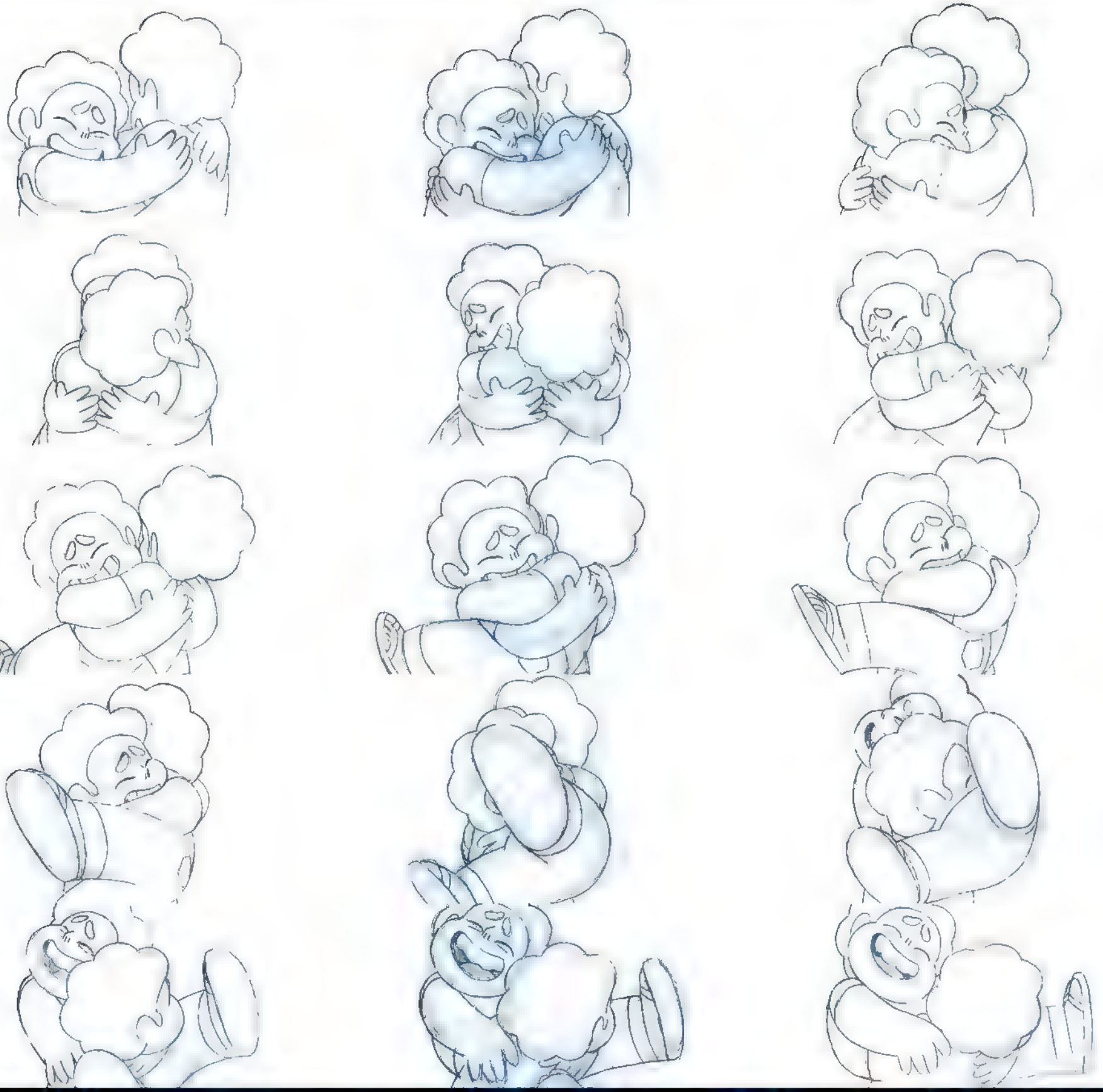
I have to say, I've been extremely grateful to hear all the positive feedback from so many fans about this little piece—it warms my heart to hear that people still love this kind of animation as much as I do.

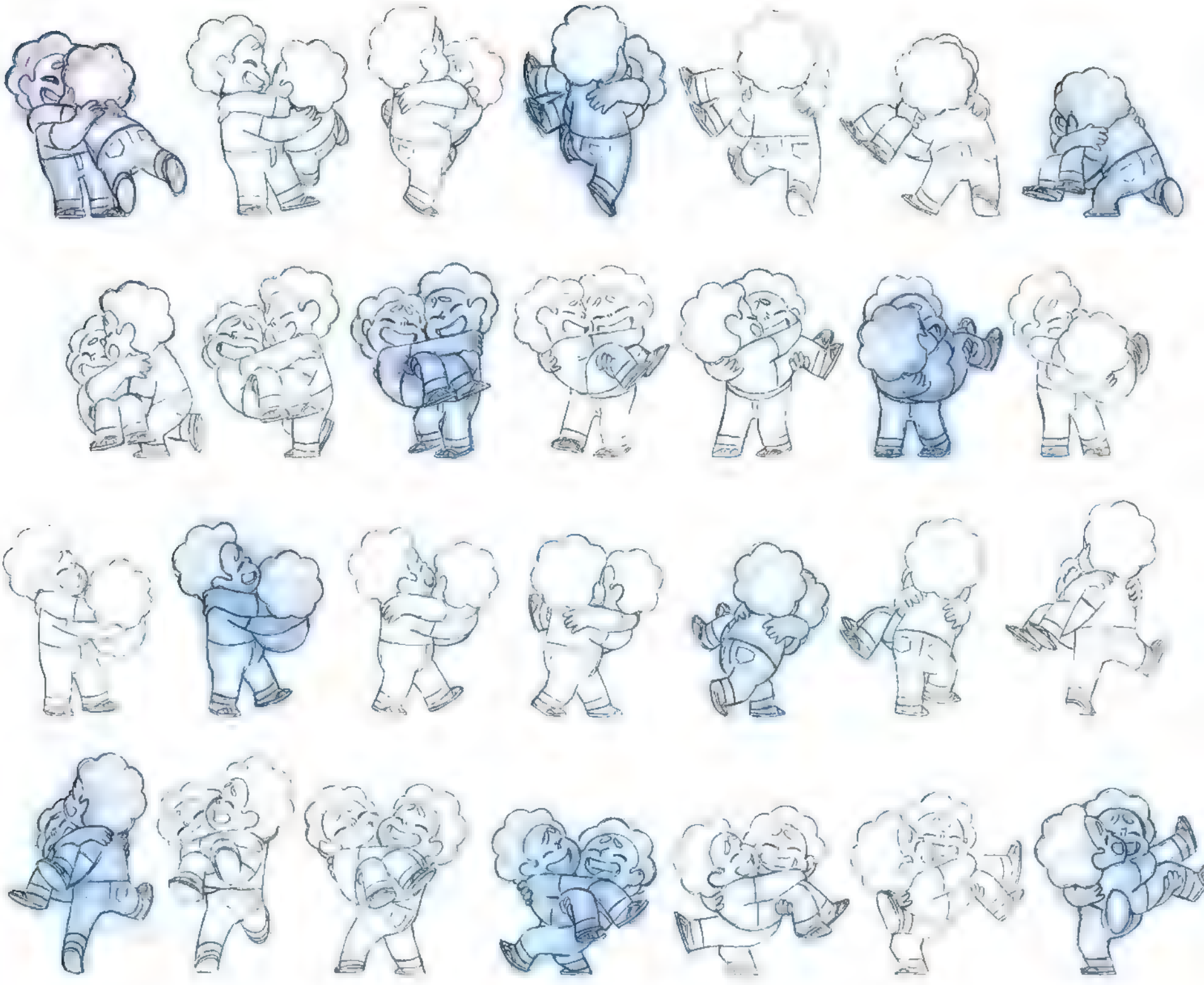


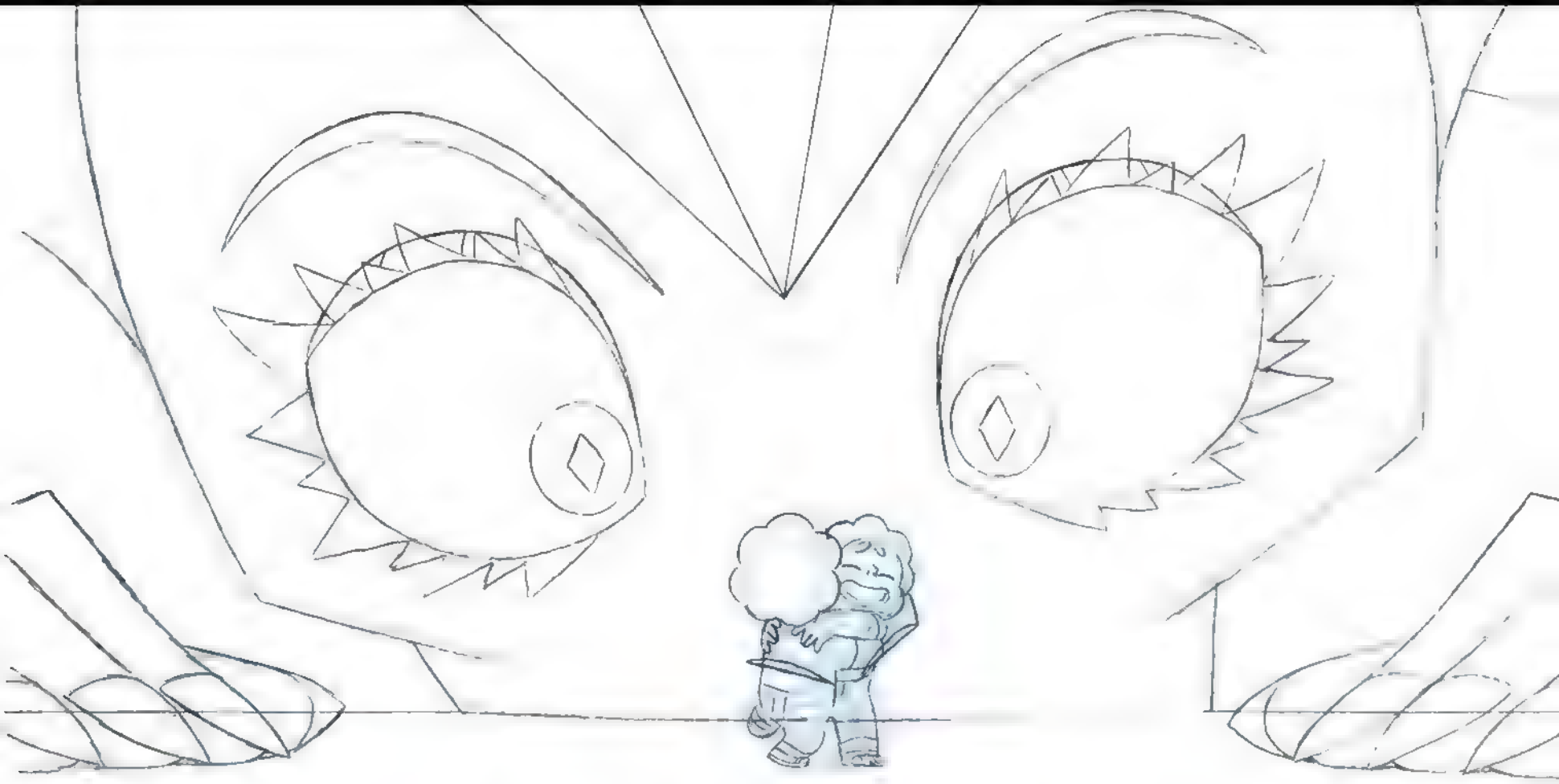








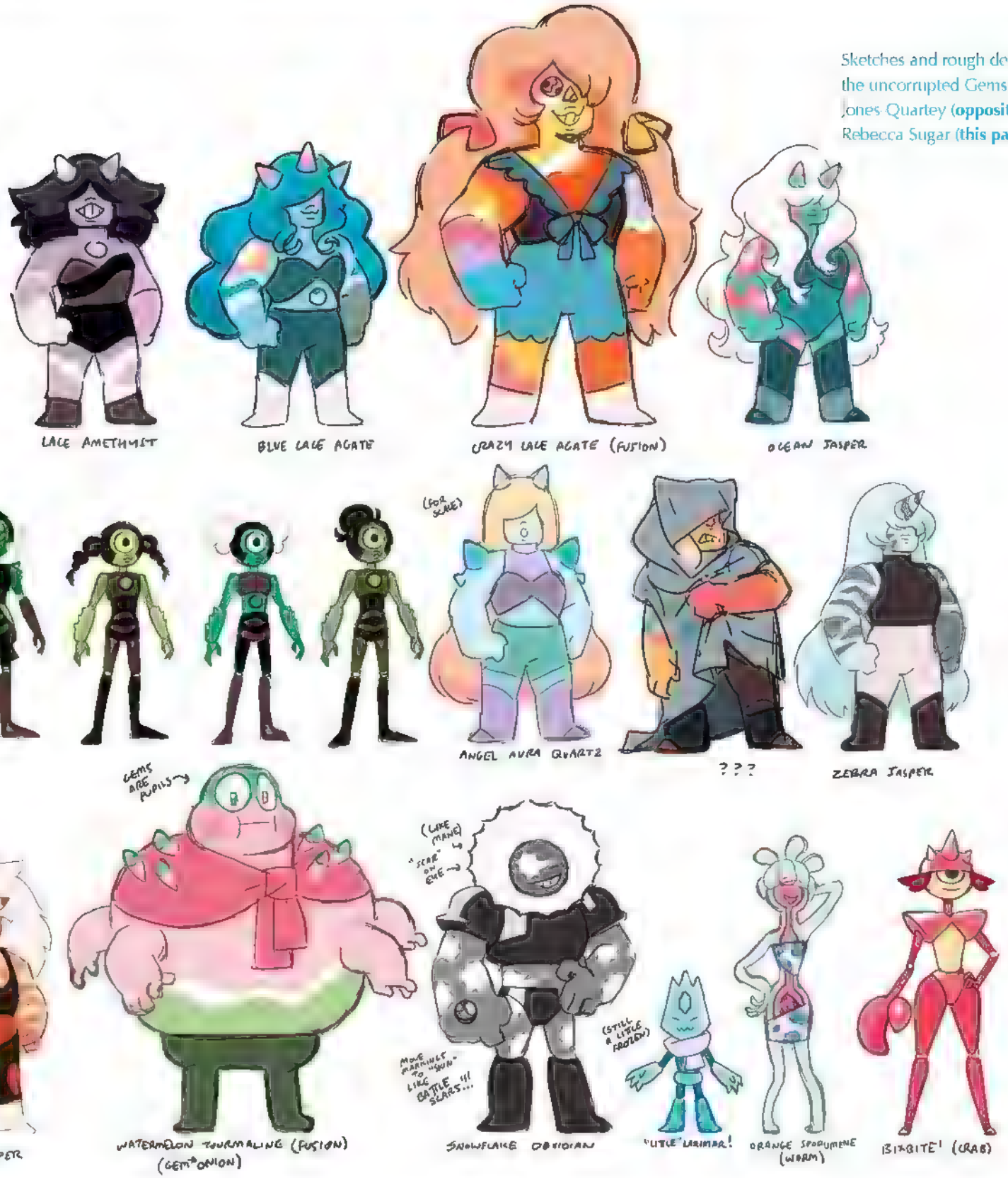


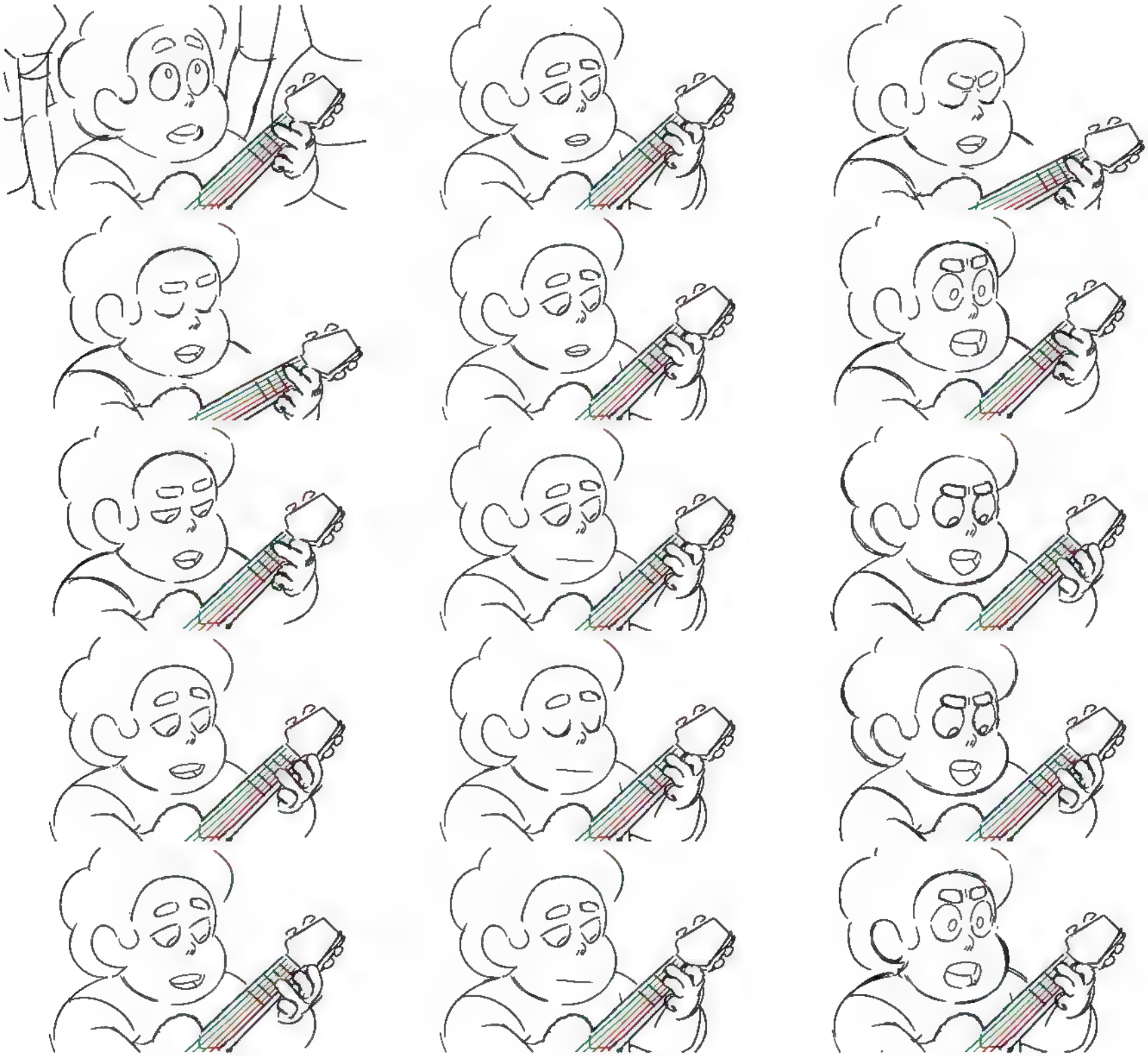


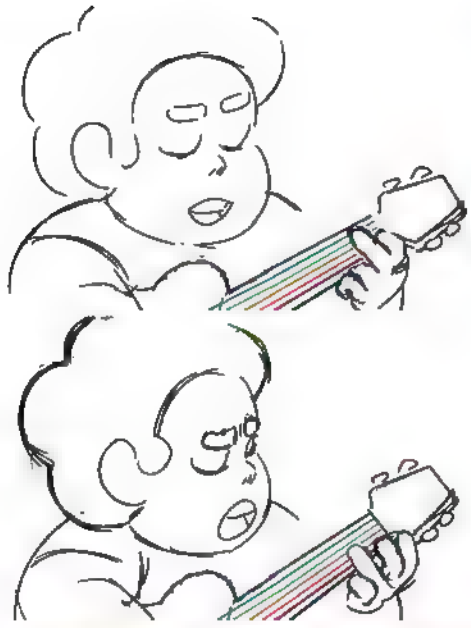
When Raymond's Mom tells Steven's Dad that Steven's Dad's face expresses the emotion of embarrassment

Aikte
Desert Glass
Watermelon Tourmaline
Blue Chalcedony
Grossular Diopside or "Tsavorite"?
Moonstone
Aventurine
Chrysocolla
White Topaz
Larimar

Sketches and rough designs for the uncorrupted Gems by Ian Jones-Quartey (**opposite**) and Rebecca Sugar (**this page**).

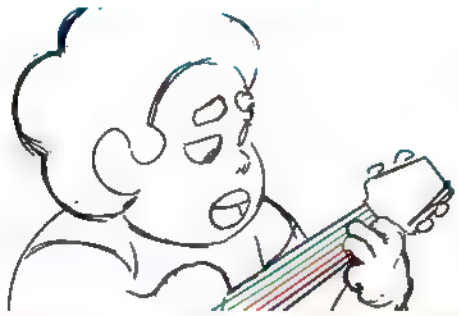




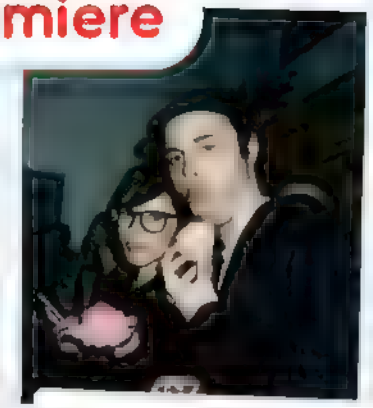
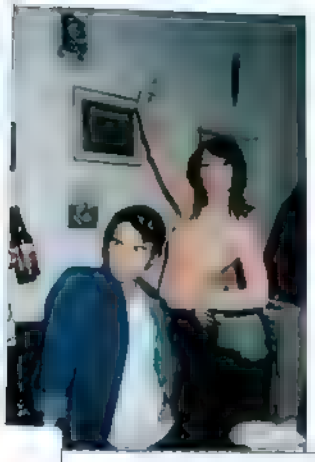


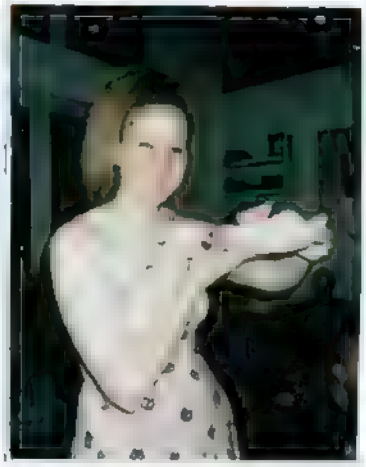
"I [illegible] respect [illegible] rose and I
don't necessarily [illegible] love me [illegible]
will want you [illegible] know you [illegible] know me
[illegible] you're singing your mind
[illegible] you're singing your mind
[illegible] you're singing your mind
[illegible] sing your mind"

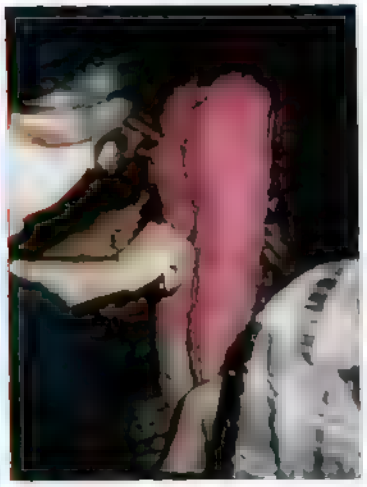
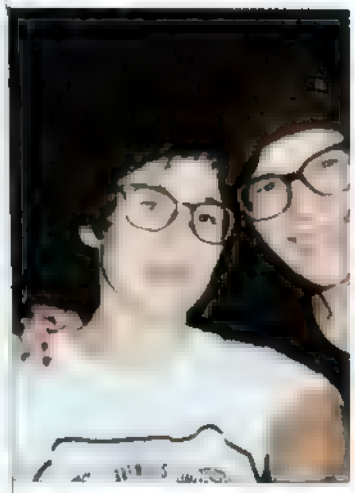
—lyrics and storyboards by Rebecca Sugar



"Change Your Mind" Premiere



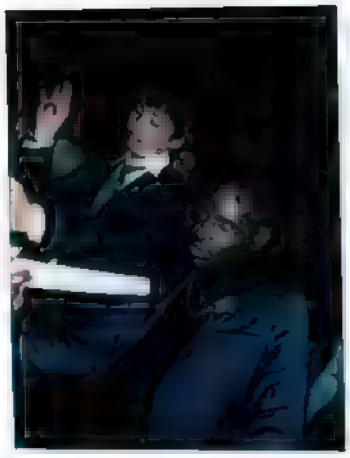



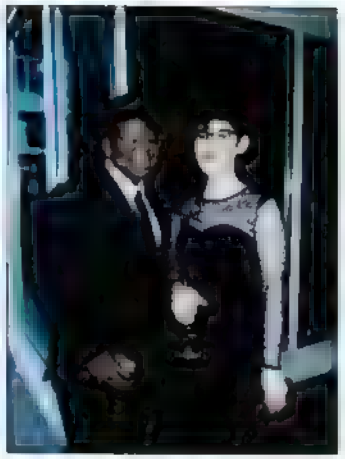
The "Change Your Mind" premiere party included a p nk legs ship made of Rice Krispies Treats by Christy Cohen

Awards

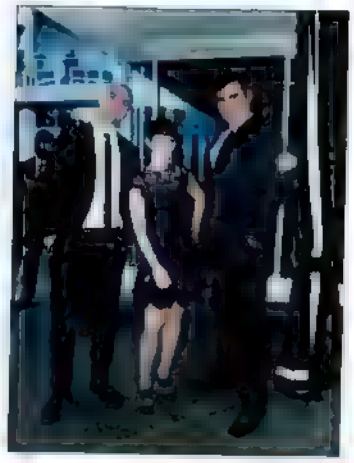
"The title song of *Steven Universe*, Rebecca Sugar's earnest fantasy epic, reassures regular viewers that "We're the Crystal Gems. We will always save the day. And if you think we can't, we will always find a way." In this superhero saga, empathy is perhaps the most important superpower—and our real world human society needs empathy now more than ever. On its surface, the animated series develops a complex mythology centering around the Crystal Gems—"polymorphic sentient rocks" who adopt more or less humanoid form as they protect young Steven and his human friends from cosmic threats. But for its fans, much of the pleasure is in its healing subtext, which fosters emotional intelligence and explores issues of identity and community. Steven's masculinity relies not on physical superiority, but emotional strength, as the heart of a family built not on blood, but mutual concern, compassion, and respect. The Crystal Gems refuse to remain in fixed human categories, always insisting on being accepted on their own terms. This season rewarded fans with the first same-sex wedding on an animated children's program. After realizing that their relationship was based on someone else's idea of who they should be, Ruby and Sapphire take the opportunity to remember their own individuality, while still choosing to spend their lives with the person they love. *Steven Universe* is a fantastical, even surreal series which nevertheless speaks to the human heart. That's why the people of the Peabody Awards believe in Garnet, Amethyst and Pearl, and . . . Steven Universe for a Peabody win."

Peabody Awards website blurb





Above and left: *Steven Universe* at the GLAAD Awards



Rebecca Sugar: This was the first year we were nominated for the GLAAD Awards, as a Comedy series. The Kids and Family award did not exist yet because there wasn't enough content to fill that category at that time. Two years later we were nominated in and won the award in the Kids and Family category, becoming the first animated series to win a GLAAD Award.

Right: A Peabody Awards photo booth with Ian, Rebecca, Joe, and Kat.

6: STEVEN UNIVERSE FUTURE

Background art from "Little Homeschool." Line art by Steven Sugar and Robb e Erwin. Painted by Patrick Bryson.

Steven is losing control. In *Steven Universe Future*, the follow-up season to the movie, his vision for a paradise of peace and interstellar togetherness in Era 3 is a smashing success . . . by most measures. The problem lies within Steven himself, and no matter how well Little Homeschool is flourishing, Steven's past trauma has him reeling, directionless and angry.

Rebecca Sugar [series creator]: The way that we would describe it internally is that "Change Your Mind" [S5E28] is the end of *Steven Universe* proper, and then the movie is its own thing, and then *Steven Universe Future* is the epilogue miniseries

Ian Jones-Quartey [former co–executive producer]. Steven is different, the world is different. There are different goals. "Change Your Mind" should be celebrated as the end. That's how I feel about it [*Laughs.*] I really love the movie and *Future* quite a bit, but I think they're different, and they each stand on their own. Clearly you need to know who the characters are from the original series to really enjoy them, but the stories are different.

The miniseries finds Steven on Earth, after the movie, with his new neck. Everyone Steven knows is maturing, learning, and doing new things. Sadie has a new partner, Shep; the band is breaking up; and Lars is going back to space. Connie only has time for fifteen-minute video chats with Steven during study breaks, and she seems to have her whole future all planned out. Steven continues being Steven, but he begins to feel left behind. Even his core habit of trying to help everyone is now producing unexpected results, leaving him questioning himself.

Rebecca: We couldn't really tell the *Steven Universe Future* story until now. Once Steven understands that he is himself, he then has to grapple with how he feels about himself as his own person, and to take responsibility for his own actions.

When our new writers Kate Tsang, Jack Pendarvis, and Taneka Stotts came in, one of the things that they were most excited about was to have Steven make some mistakes of his own, not just grapple with mistakes that his mother had made. I was excited about that, and also about exploring how he'd really feel and behave after everything he's been through. I wanted to explore the toll it took on him.

Taneka Stotts [writer]: I thought it would be great if Steven could have the chance to finally take responsibility for his own actions. It's not to say

(Continued on page 210)

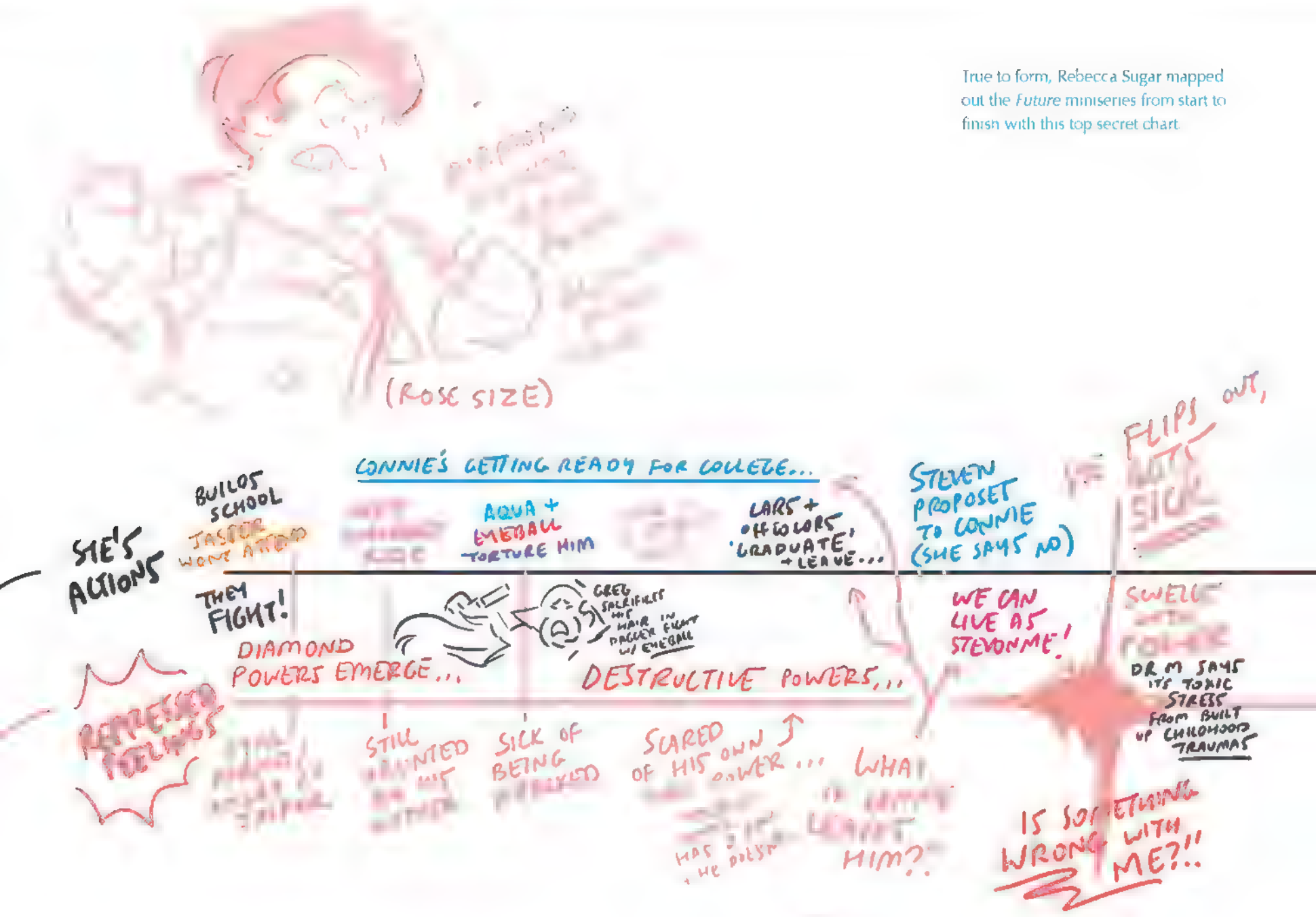
STEVEN UNIVERSE FUTURE

* STILL HELPING OTHERS NON-STOP

AFTER SAVING THE UNIVERSE, STEVEN IS STILL AT IT, TYING UP EVERY LOOSE END... BUT AS HE RUNS OUT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS TO SOLVE... HE'LL HAVE TO FINALLY FACE HIS OWN PROBLEMS...

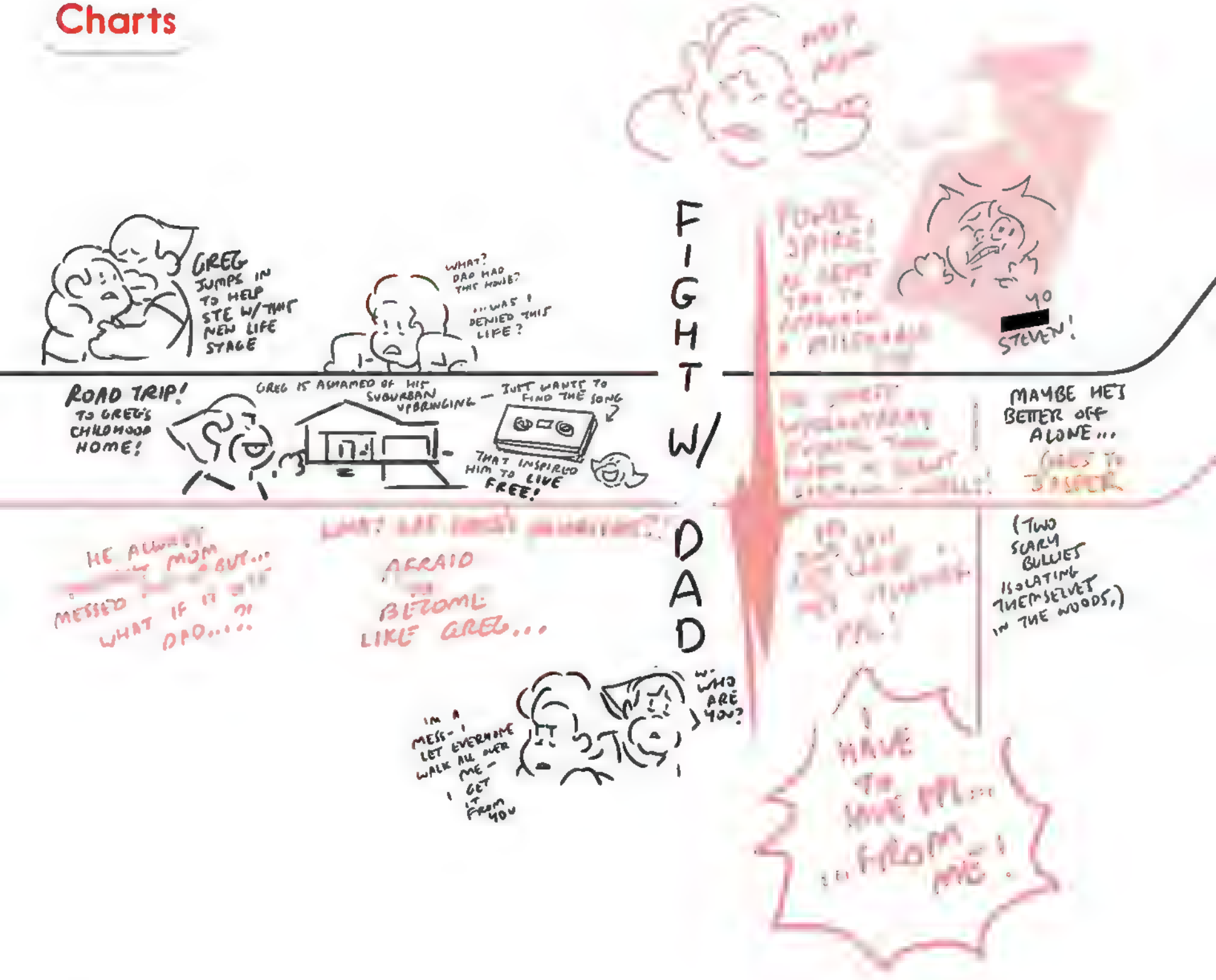
SACRIFICING HIS CHILDHOOD FOR THE GREATER GOOD, FAMILY FEUDS & NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES, UNDISCUSSED, UNDEALT-WITH — IT'S ALL CATCHING UP TO STEVEN, MANIFESTING AS STRANGE, DESTRUCTIVE NEW POWERS...

NOW THAT HE'S SAVED EVERYONE ELSE, CAN HE SAVE HIMSELF???


(ROSE SIZE)
CONNIE'S GETTING READY FOR COLLEGE...
BUILDS SCHOOL
JASPER WON'T ATTEND
AQUA + EYEBALL TORTURE HIM
LARS + OFFICERS 'GRADUATE' + LEAVE...
STEVEN PROPOSET TO CONNIE (SHE SAYS NO)
FLIPS OUT, NOT SICK
SHE'S ACTIONS
THEY FIGHT!
GREG SACRIFICES HIS HAIR IN DAGGER FIGHT W/ EYEBALL
DIAMOND POWERS EMERGE...
DESTRUCTIVE POWERS...
WE CAN LIVE AS STEVONNE!
SWELLS UP
DR M SAYS IT'S TOXIC STRESS FROM BUILT UP CHILDHOOD TRAUMAS
REPRESSED FEELINGS
STILL PAINTED BY HIS SISTER
SICK OF BEING PERFECTED
SCARED OF HIS OWN POWER...
WHAT IS HAPPENING TO HIM?
HAS IT HE DOESN'T
IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME?!!

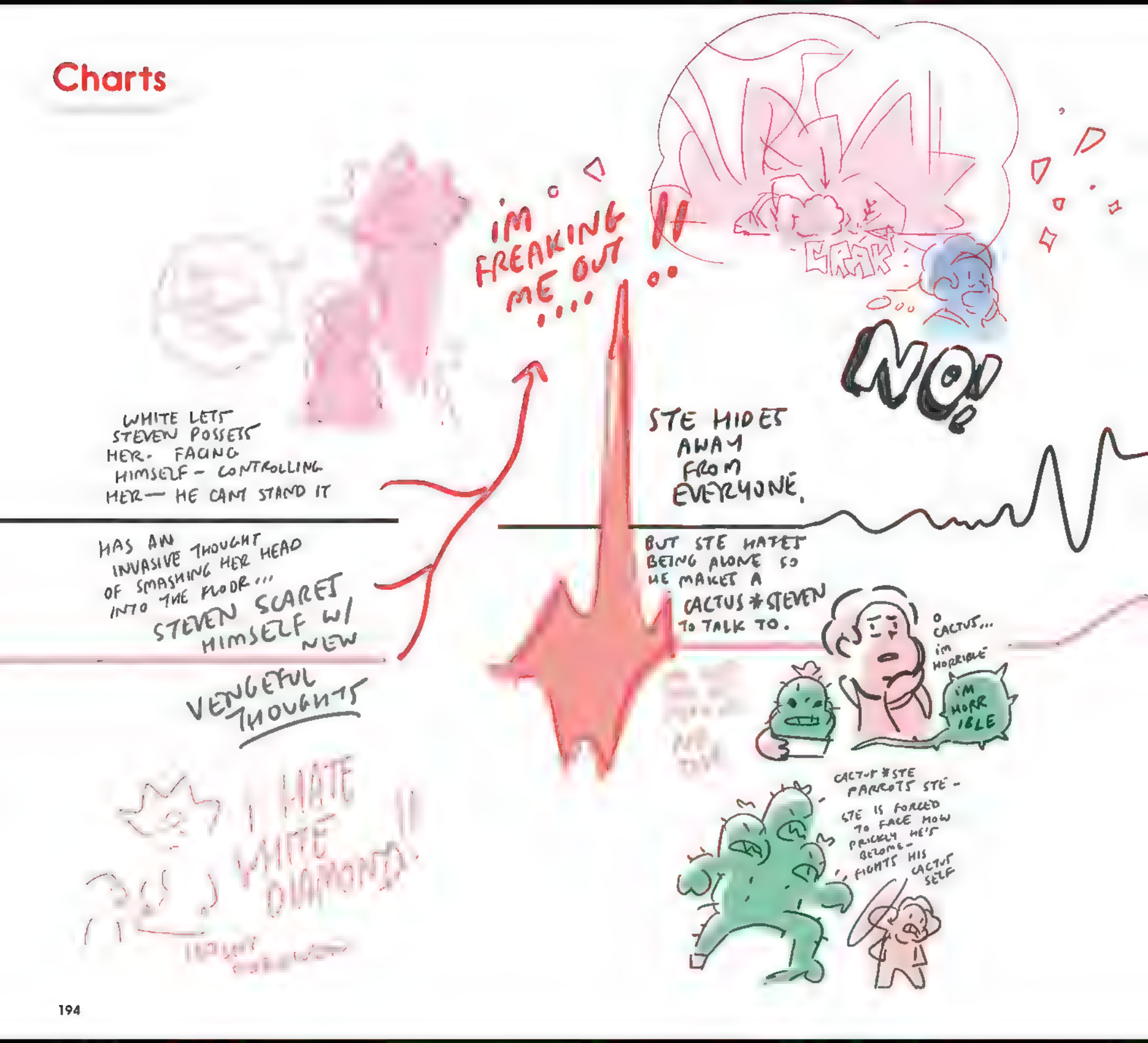
True to form, Rebecca Sugar mapped out the *Future* miniseries from start to finish with this top secret chart.

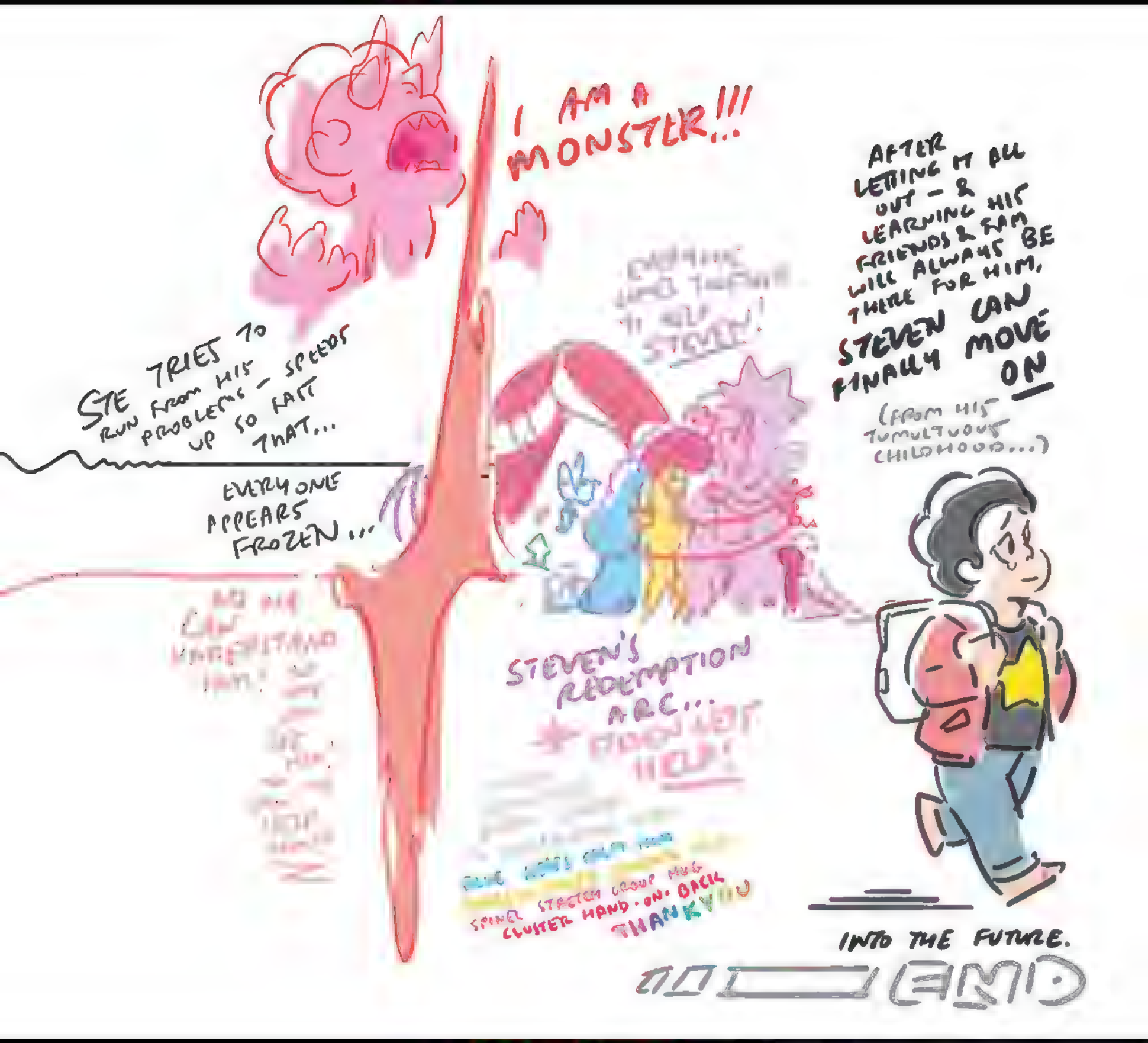
Charts


FIGHT W/ DAD
GREG JUMPS IN TO HELP STE W/ THAT NEW LIFE STAGE
WHAT? DAD HAD THIS HOUSE?
...WAS I DENIED THIS LIFE?
ROAD TRIP! TO GREG'S CHILDHOOD HOME!
GREG IS ASHAMED OF HIS SUBURBAN UPBRINGING —
JEFF WANTS TO FIND THE SONG
THAT INSPIRED HIM TO LIVE FREE!
HE ALWAYS MOM BUT... MESSED WHAT IF IT DAD...?
AFRAID BECOME LIKE GREG...
IM A MESS- I LET EVERYONE WALK ALL OVER ME- I GET IT FROM YOU
W- WHO ARE YOU?
POWER SPIRAL!
TO STEVEN!
MAYBE HE'S BETTER OFF ALONE...
(TWO SCARY BULLIES ISOLATING THEMSELVES IN THE WOODS.)
I HAVE TO HAVE IT... ...FROM ME!

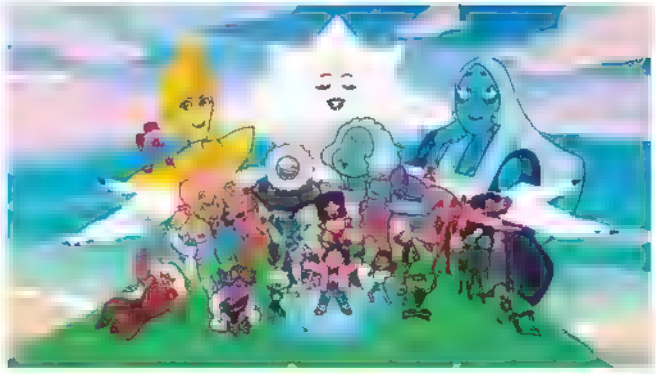
STEVEN HEADS TO THE DIAMONDS. HE MUST CONTROL THIS DESTRUCTIVE DIAMOND POWER/ SICKNESS
I HATE I CAN'T AGREE TO HIS POWER— SHE'LL TEST IT!
SHE PUNCHES HIM
HE FRANTICALLY HEALS HER— IT WORKS— BUT THIS IS TOO FAR...
IM SORRY
DONT APOLOGIZE FOR YOUR STRENGTH
BOOM MODS.
TO HIS SURPRISE, THEY'RE DOING GREAT!
EXPLORING CONSTRUCTIVE POWERS AND WELLNESS!
HAPPY CLOUDS
CHANNELING OTHERS' VOICES!
LOVE HEAL!
HATE HEE

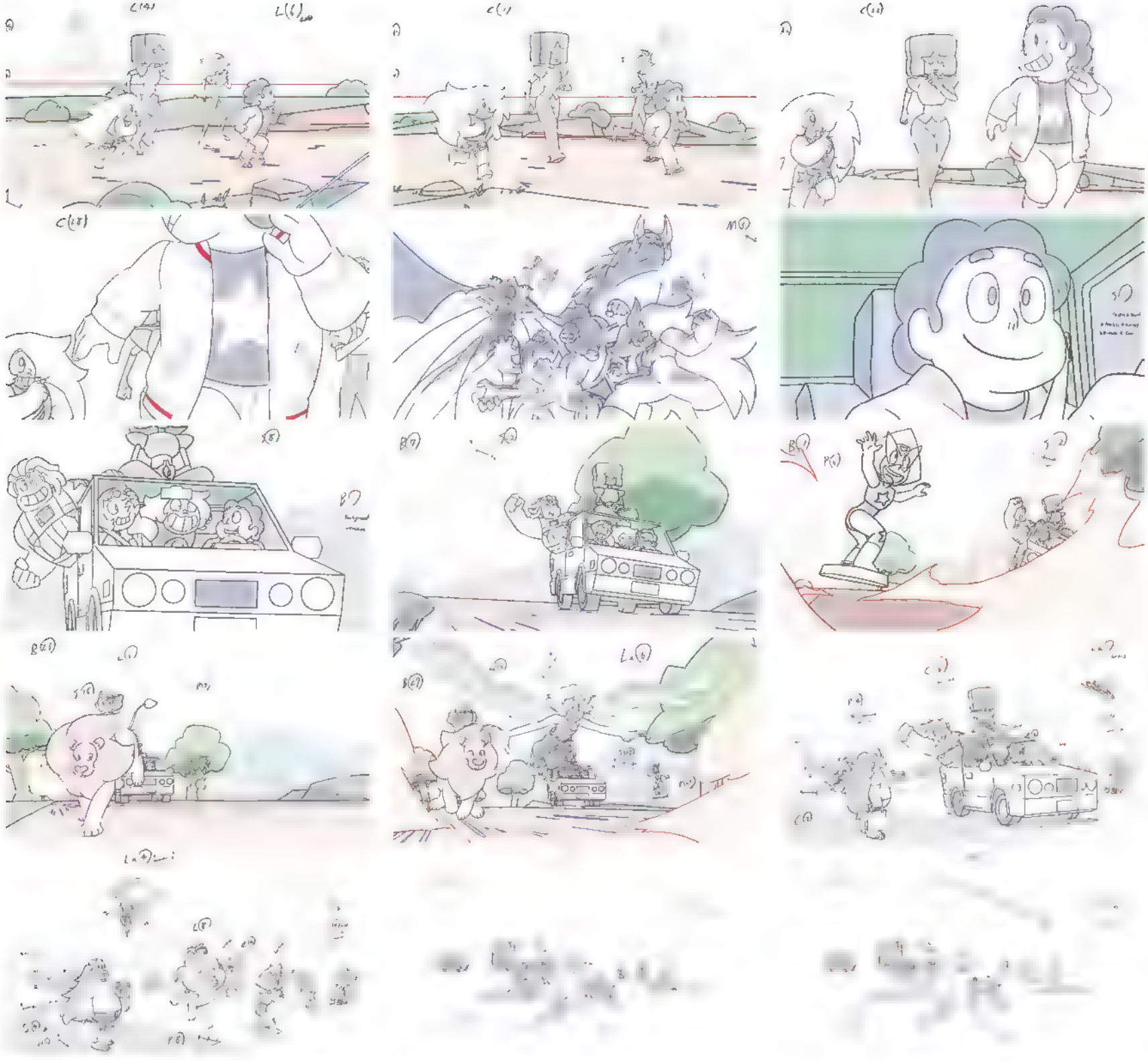
Charts


WHITE LETS STEVEN POSSESS HER. FACING HIMSELF - CONTROLLING HER— HE CAN'T STAND IT
HAS AN INVASIVE THOUGHT OF SMASHING HER HEAD INTO THE FLOOR...
STEVEN SCARES HIMSELF W/ NEW VENGEFUL THOUGHTS
I HATE WHITE DIAMOND!!
I'M FREAKING ME OUT...
STE HIDES AWAY FROM EVERYONE.
BUT STE HATES BEING ALONE SO HE MAKES A CACTUS*STEVEN TO TALK TO.
O CACTUS... I'M HORRIBLE
I'M HORR IBLE
CACTUS*STE PARROTS STE - STE IS FORCED TO FACE HOW PRICKLY HE'S BECOME - FIGHTS HIS CACTUS SELF
SMAK
NO!

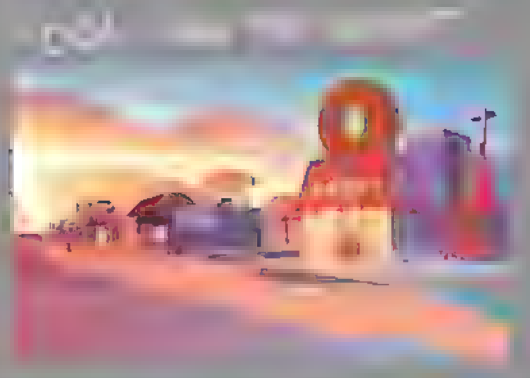

I AM A MONSTER!!!
STE TRIES TO RUN FROM HIS PROBLEMS - SPEEDS UP SO FAST THAT...
EVERYONE APPEARS FROZEN...
STEVEN'S REDEMPTION ARC...
AFTER LETTING IT ALL OUT - & LEARNING HIS FRIENDS & FAM WILL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR HIM, STEVEN CAN FINALLY MOVE ON
(FROM HIS TUMULTUOUS CHILDHOOD...)
INTO THE FUTURE.
THE END

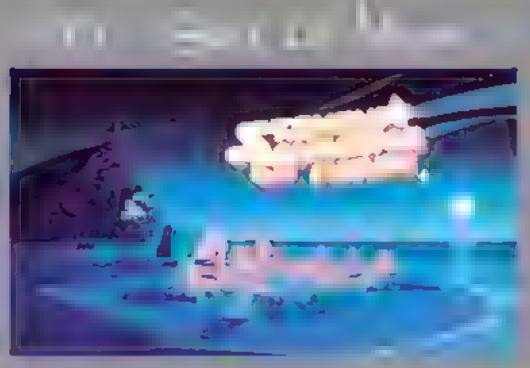
The kinetic *Steven Universe Future* opening credits animation. Key animation by Takafumi Hori. Boards by Miki Brewster and Etienne Guignard





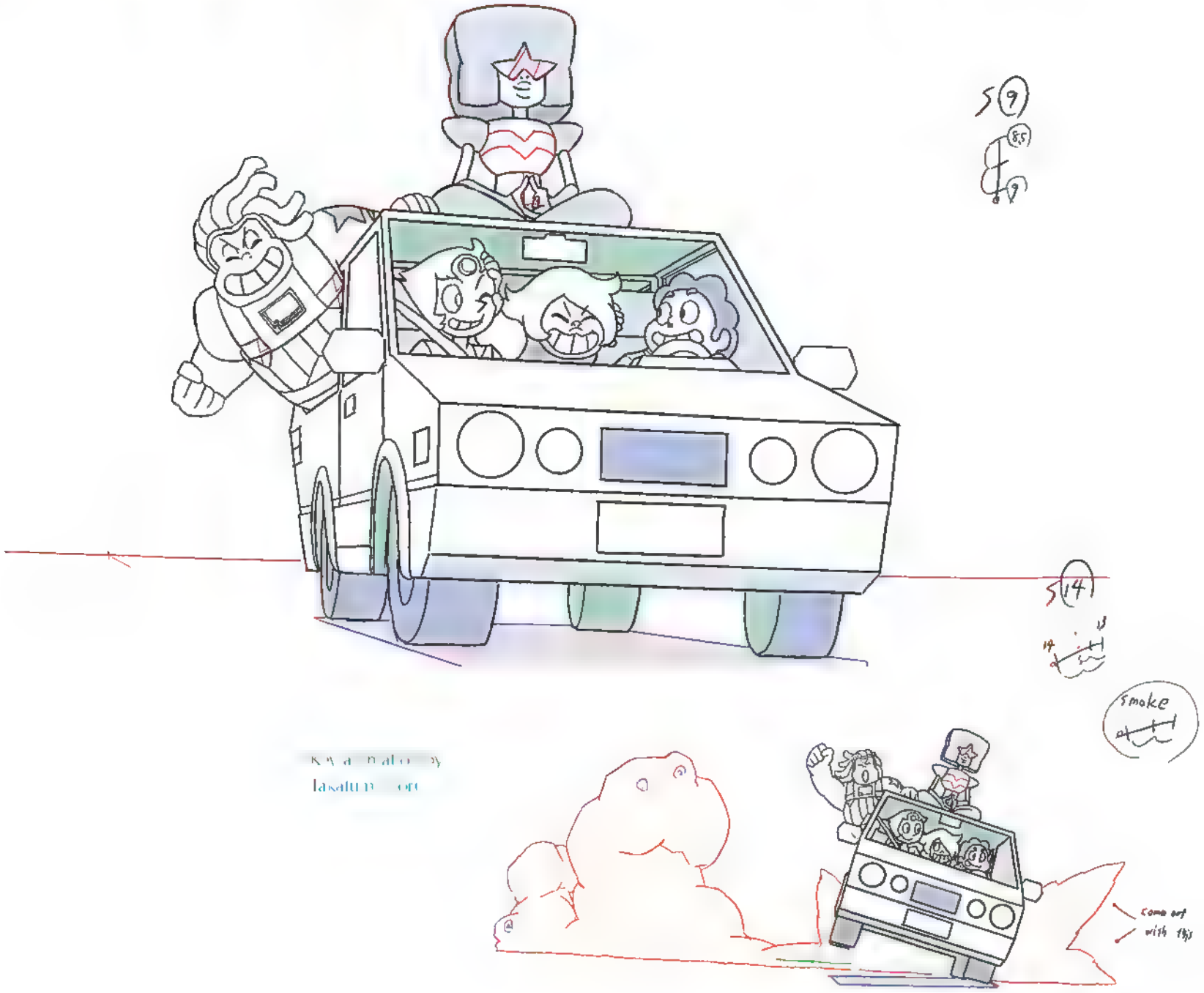
Color scripts by Liz Artinian (**top**) and Patrick Bryson (**bottom**) were a planning tool for directing the mood of sequences of shots through color and value. **Opposite:** Background art from the *Future* opening credits sequence by Liz Artinian, Julian De Perio, Leonard Hung, and Steven Sugar

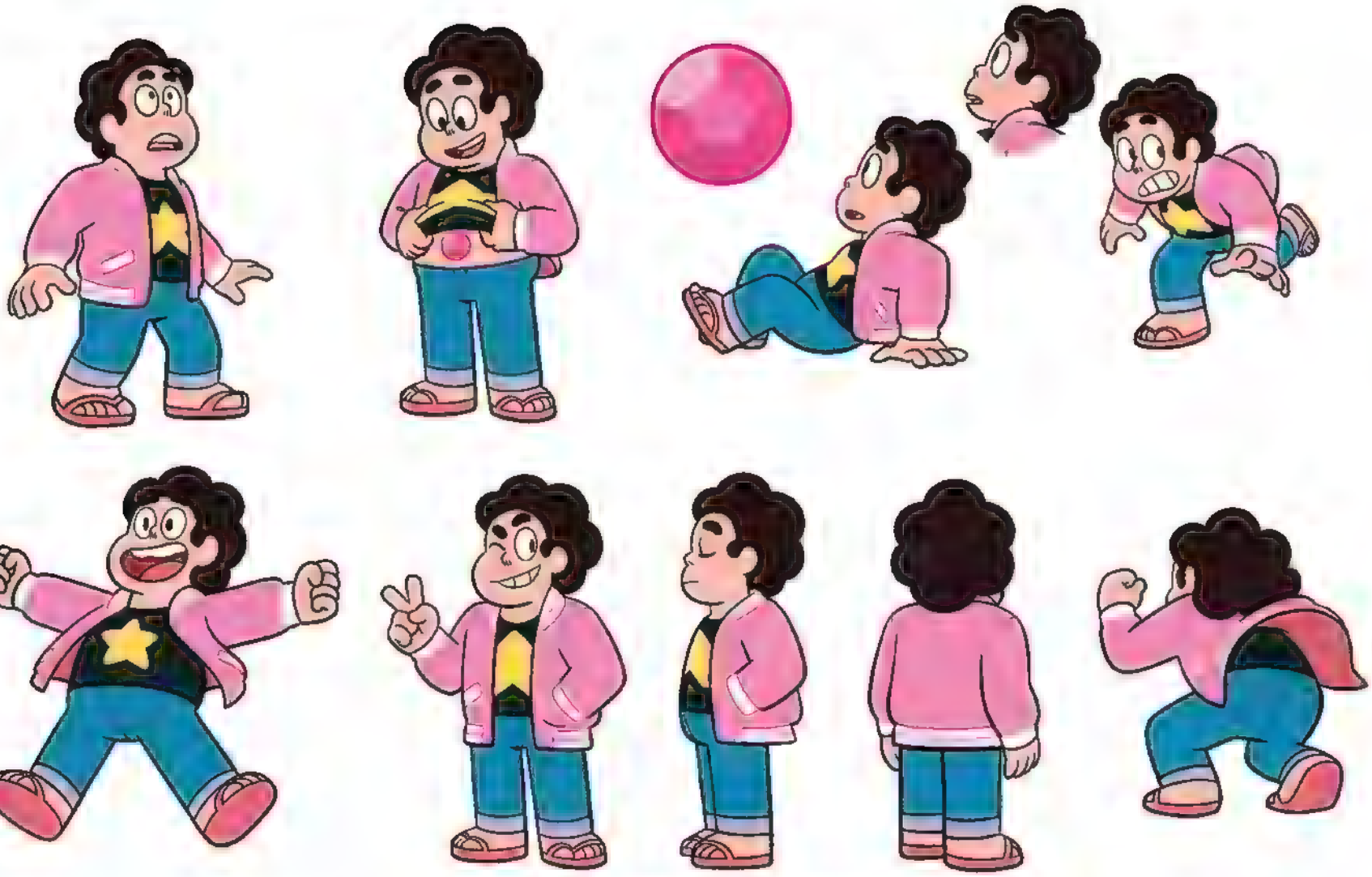


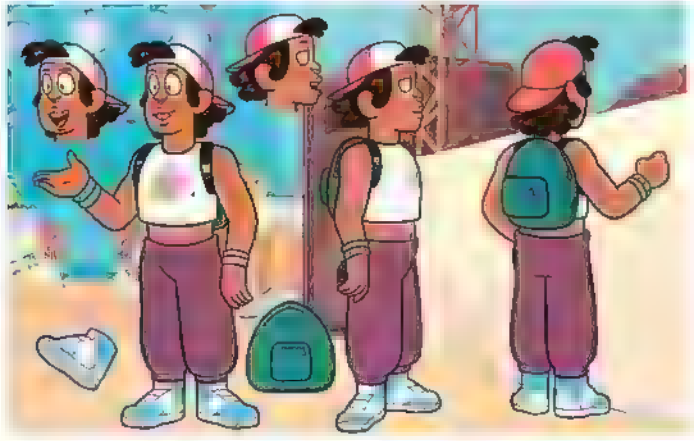


BIG DONUT
BEACH CITY
EAT A BIG Donut

Here We Are in the Future



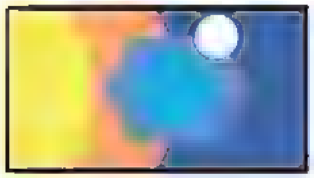


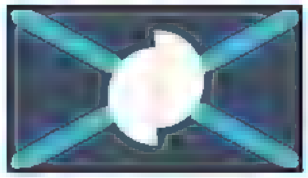


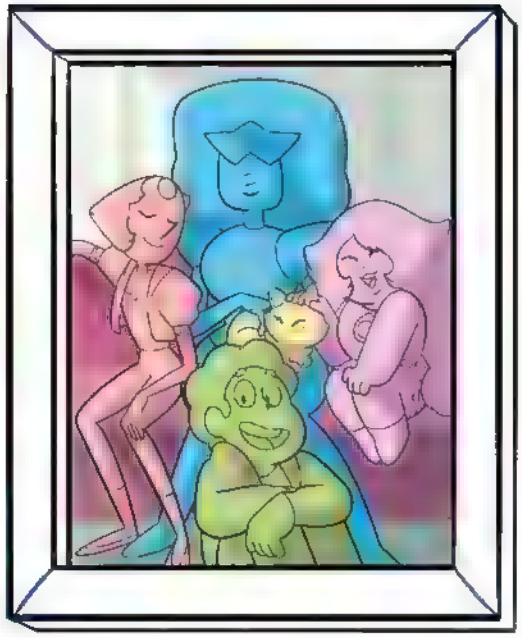
Steven's new model includes new clothes and a neck. Other new friends include Shep, Sadie's partner. Model sheet and special poses by Becky Dreistadt. Color design by Ashley Fisher.

Top Background art from "Little Homeschool" Layout art by Leonard Robinson. Background paint by Patrick Bryson. **Above** Story sketch art by Joe Johnston. **Right** Background art from "Little Graduation" Layout art by Alex Mering and Leonard Robinson. Background painting by Patrick Bryson.

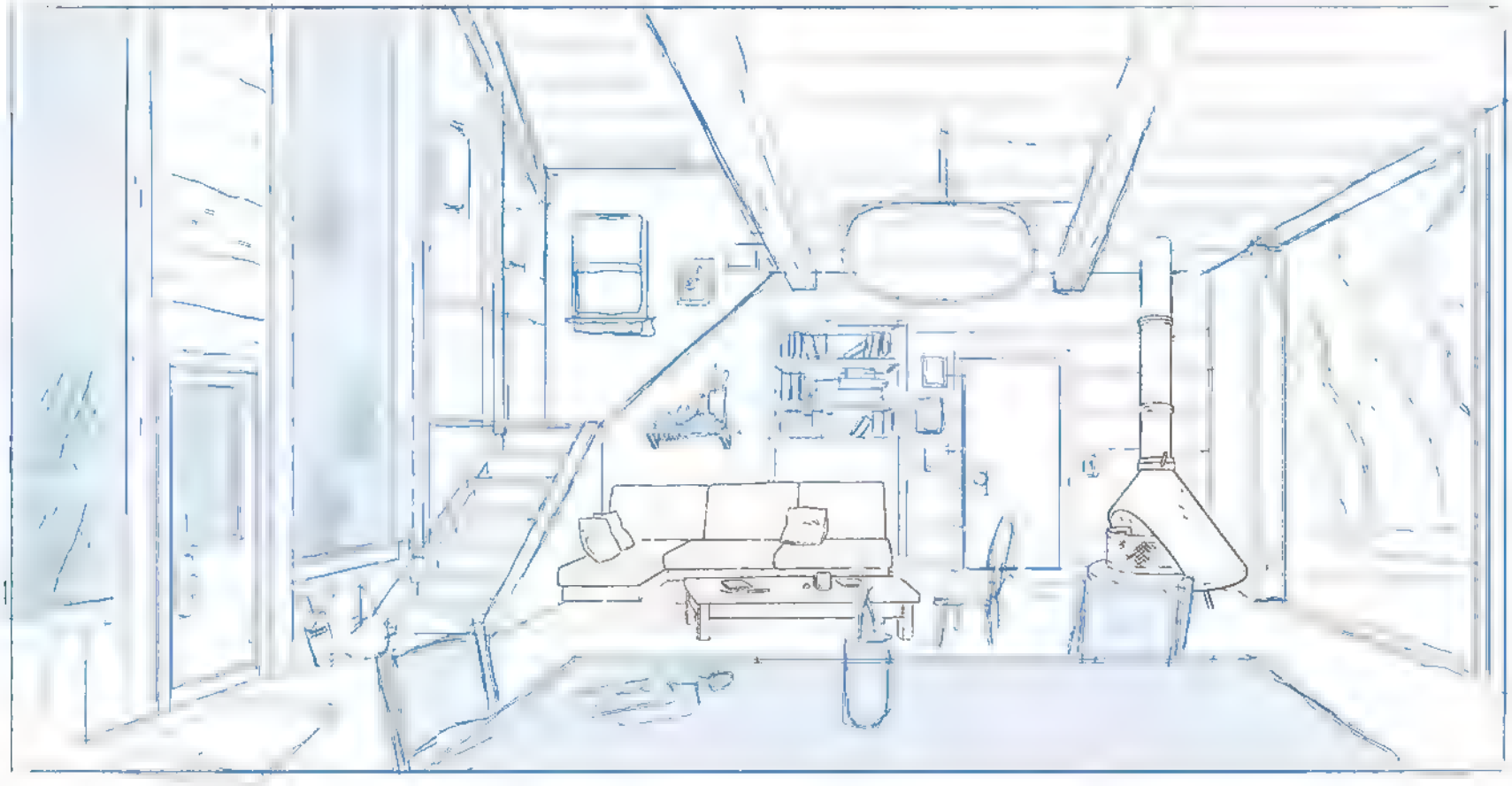
Above: Concept art of the Little Homeschool by Steven Sugar. **Top**: Storyboard art from the episode "Little Homeschool" by Joe Johnston; revisions by Nicole Rodriguez

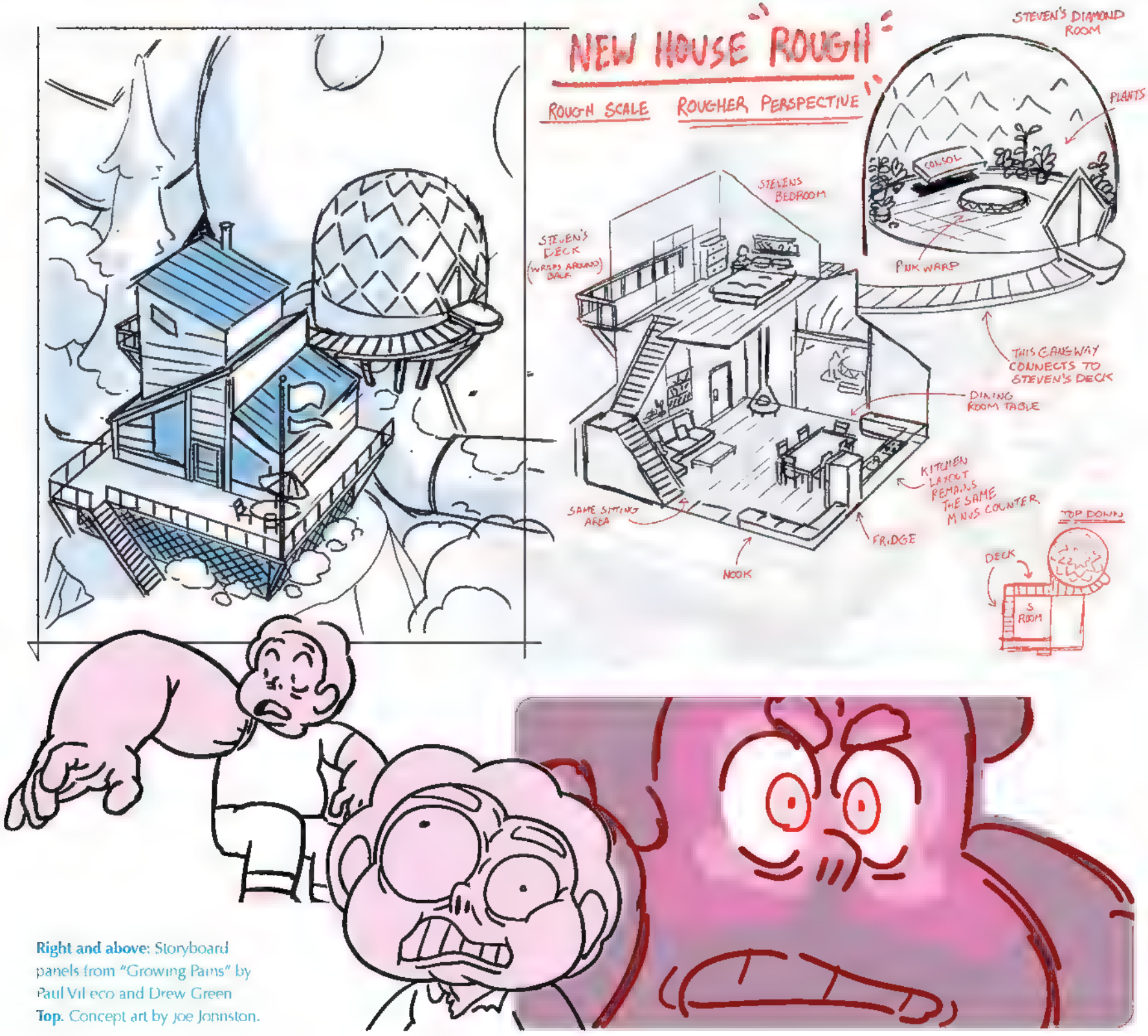






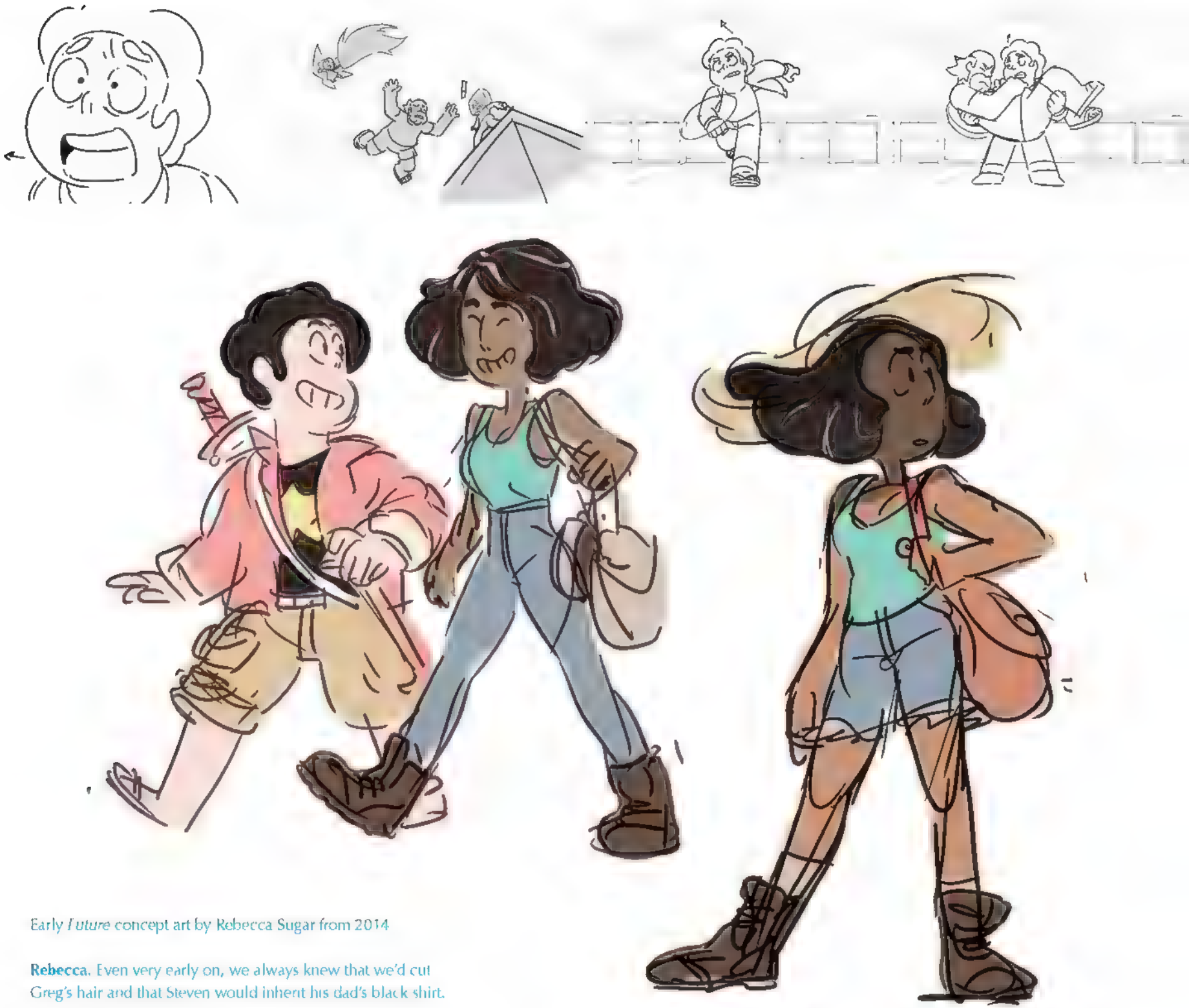
Concept art for the updated *Future* beach house by Steven Sugar. **Right** Painting by Becky Dreistadt





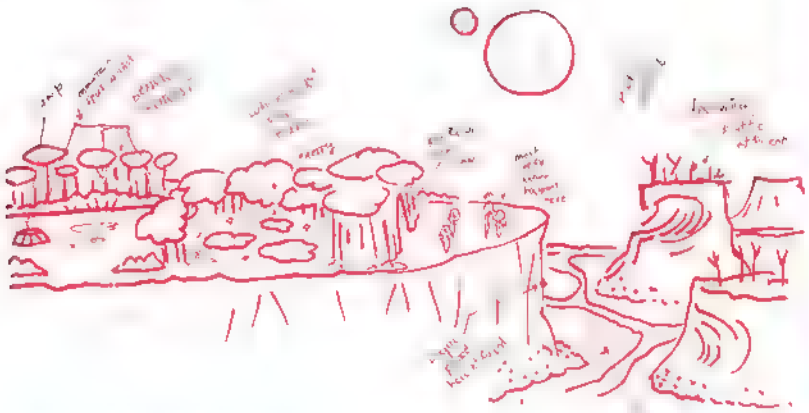
Right and above: Storyboard panels from "Growing Pains" by Paul Vil eco and Drew Green
Top. Concept art by Joe Johnston.

Selected storyboard panels from
"Bluebird" by Miki Brewster.



Early *Future* concept art by Rebecca Sugar from 2014

Rebecca. Even very early on, we always knew that we'd cut Greg's hair and that Steven would inherit his dad's black shirt.



Far right [illegible] for art for "Why So Blue" by [illegible], [illegible] and Alex Myung. Background paint by Patrick Hyson, Charles Hilton and Isa Tsai.

Top An [illegible] by Alex Myung and Isa Tsai showing [illegible] staging of events in the episode "Why So Blue?" **Above** design [illegible] for Nacre Lips Mountains and [illegible] Waterfalls.

(Continued from page 189)

he hasn't, but Rose has always been central to his problems, and now that it is the future, I was hoping he could make his own mistakes, learn from them, and grow even stronger as an individual.

Rebecca: I started to think about all the hero stories where the climax is a fight—fighting for what you believe in. These stories never really grapple with the fact that being in a fight is really unhealthy for a person, even when you win. I feel like if you grow up watching movies, you might think that there's nothing better in the world than being in a fight and winning, but being in a fight can really be difficult for you physically, emotionally, and developmentally. Steven's been through a lot, and he came out victorious, but he took a lot of damage.

The end of "Change Your Mind" is the conclusion that Steven needs to reach; he's so relieved and excited to be himself, and he loves being himself so much. But that takes maintenance; there's not a eureka moment when you suddenly love yourself forever. I wanted to talk about how even afterward you have to work to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself. So *Future* is about him really hitting a breaking point and realizing that he needs to prioritize himself. His relationship with himself is as important, if not more important, than all the other positive relationships in his life.

Drew Green [storyboard artist]: It was exciting and unique, getting to work with this familiar character as he experienced all his internal struggles.

Jack Pendarvis [writer]: In the first several outlines, some of the internal struggles were going to manifest themselves as "poetic inner monologues." We always had a moment where Steven was going to think about things in a poetic inner monologue, which would have been a big stylistic break from the earlier episodes. But nobody really seemed to think it would be fun or interesting to write a poetic inner monologue. Still, the very idea of it illustrates how everyone was grasping for a new way for Steven to express himself, or to discover new feelings that he might not have been able to acknowledge before.

Taneka: I have to add that I'm happy the poetic inner monologues didn't make it into the final rounds of edits. They were a great core concept, but I think cutting them gave rise to everyone else being able to speak and openly converse with Steven.

Maya Petersen [storyboard artist]: I forgot about those! I think one of *Steven Universe*'s strongest points—even despite being fairly talky—is the way it shows rather than tells, so maybe the internal narration would have been out of place.

Before boarding on *Future*, I remember talking to Rebecca briefly about how Steven had been the moral compass of the show up to this point, as a consequence of the story being told strictly from his point of view. This isn't verbatim what she said, but what I took from that conversation was that one of the goals of this last season was to demonstrate that while Steven's a *very good boy*, he has been an unreliable narrator and a biased moral compass—even if we maintained the Steven-only POV for *Future* [with the exception of "I Am My Monster" (S1E19)].

After season five, which ended with "Change Your Mind," the movie went into production, and then season six ramped up before the movie's completion. Some of the previous Burbank-based crew had moved on to other opportunities, and the solid slate of work required that many new faces be added to the creative team, which was an opportunity for new personal perspectives. Joining a mature show in progress could be intimidating, however, especially when it is one with such intricate continuity and with such invested fans as *Steven* has.

Drew: There were a lot of things I never realized about the characters—really specific and nuanced things that were surprising to me. That Garnet never asks questions—apparently a pretty well-known fact—was sort of mind-shattering and brilliant!

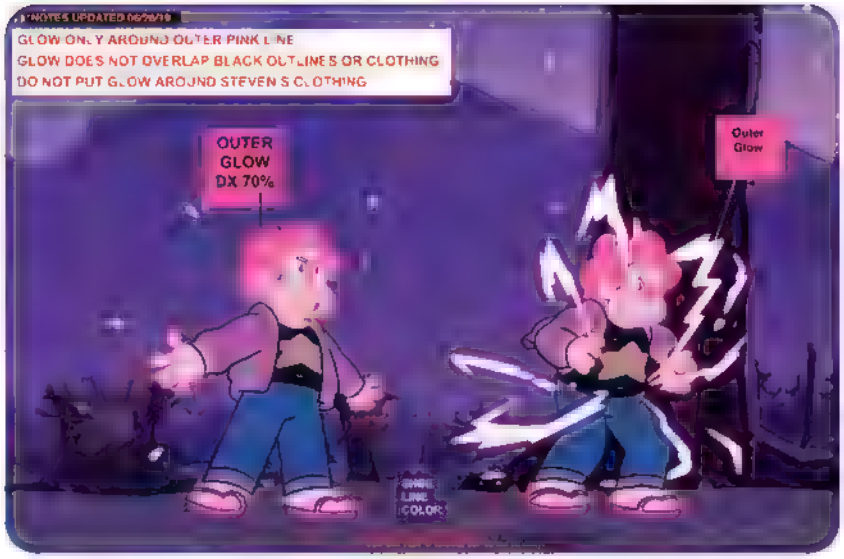
(Continued on page 215)

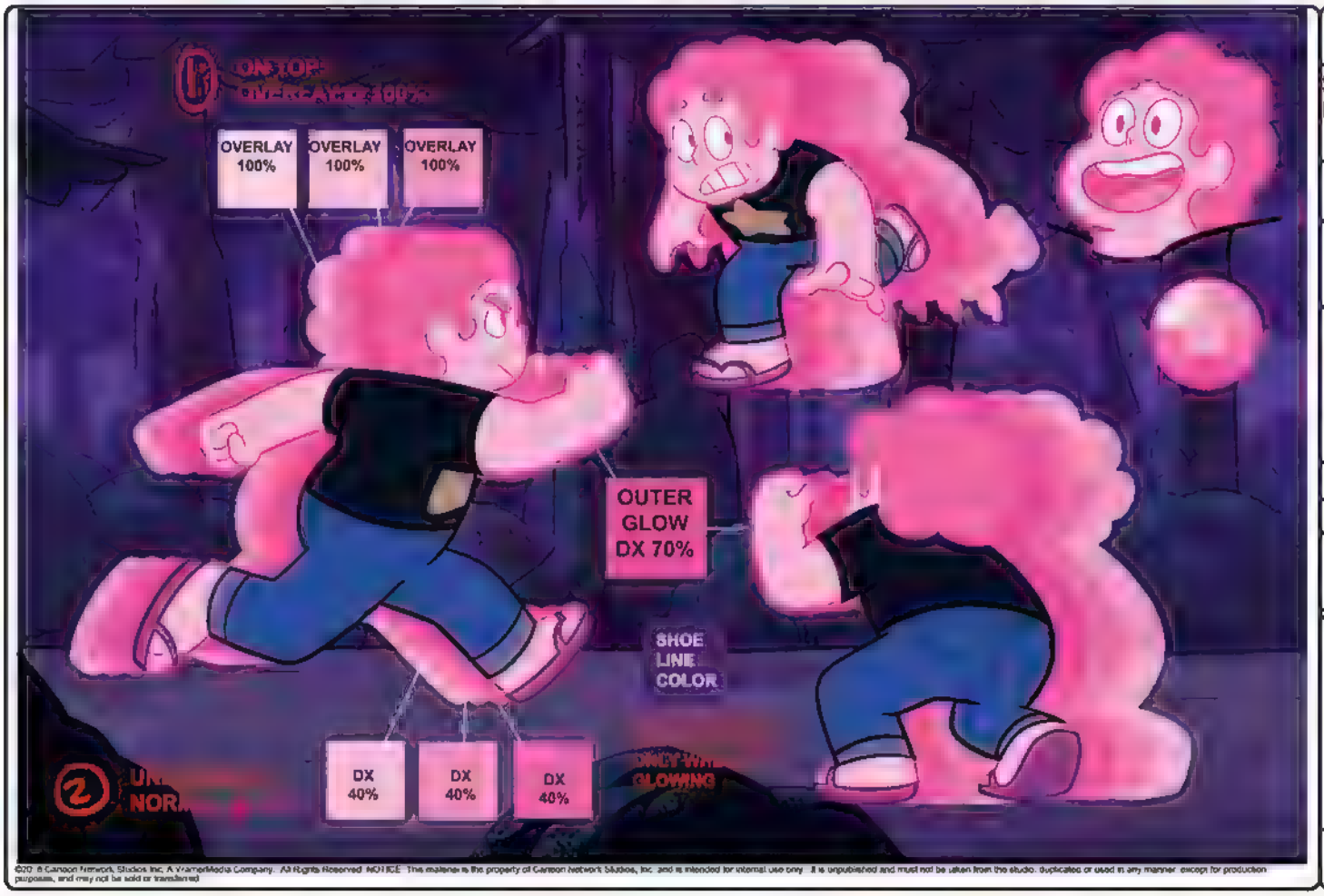
LEFT HAND PALM

LEFT HAND BACK

Above Background for the [illegible] Design by Patrick Aryson

Left Sketches and [illegible] Character designs by Becky Dreistadt and [illegible] Ashley Usher





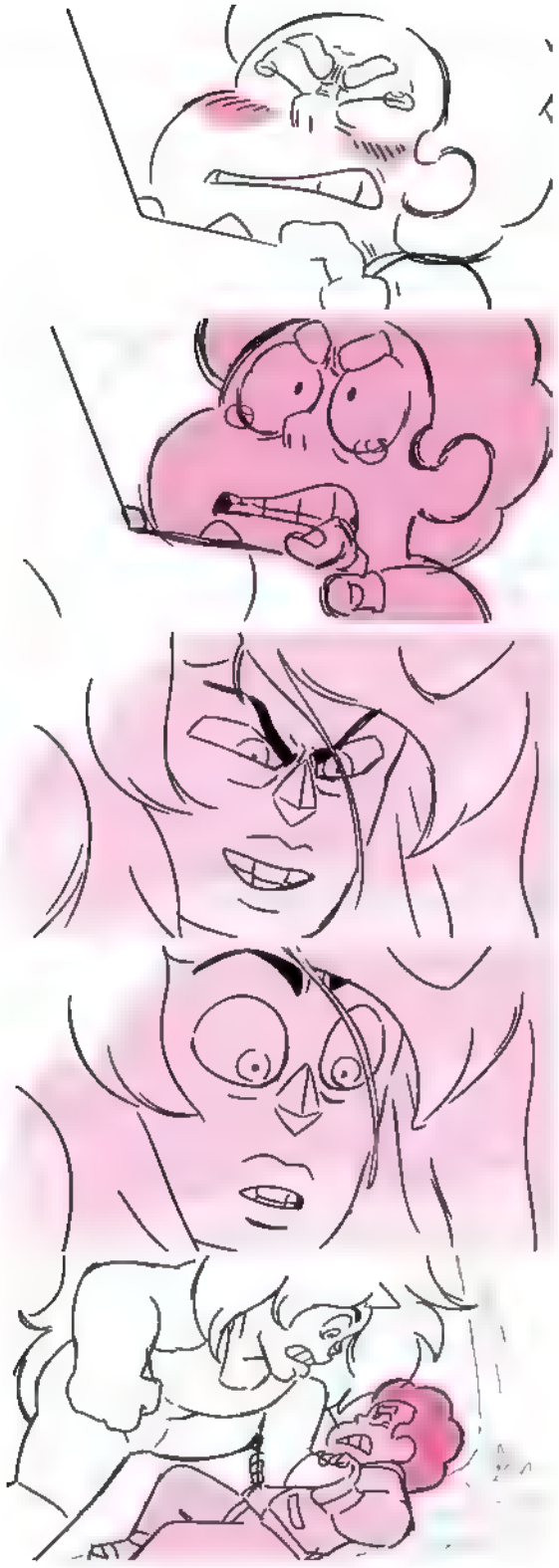
sc: 106	pg:
STEVEN UNIVERSE	
season: 1077	episode: 176
episode title: Fragments	
model: Pink Teen Steven - No Jacket - With Speed After Image	
E176s106_3494	
palette: Night	
notes:	

CARTOON NETWORK STUDIOS

©20 ® Cartoon Network Studios Inc. A WarnerMedia Company. All Rights Reserved. NOTICE: This material is the property of Cartoon Network Studios, Inc. and is intended for internal use only. It is unpublished and must not be taken from the studio, duplicated or used in any manner except for production purposes, and may not be sold or transferred.

effects model designs by Becky Dreistadt from "Fragments," ustrate to the animation studio the intended usage and forms Color design by Ashley Fisher

Left Rebecca Sugar's early "Pentagon Steven" concept art, 2013. **Right** Storyboard panels from Jasper's showdown with Steven by Rebecca.



(Continued from page 210)

Beyond that, I'd always been a fan of the show before getting to be a part of it. I didn't want to come in and make a mess of things, so I was happy to get advice from those who'd been working on it since day zero. It was hugely inspirational

Jack: It blew my mind that we were always in Steven's point of view. As a person who had watched the show a lot, somehow I had never thought about that. I'm not very bright! But eventually I got it drilled into my brain to such an extent that I'd be watching another TV show, or a movie or something, and they'd switch POV and I'd briefly think, "Hey! They can't do that!" At the same time, it felt like Rebecca wanted to shake things up in a lot of ways, too. So it wasn't exactly like coming onto "classic" *Steven*, though the responsibility to the characters felt the same

I remember when I had my job interview, Rebecca said she was bringing two other people into the writers' room whom she thought I would like: "a filmmaker"—she meant Kate, as I would later learn—and "a person from the world of comics"—that was Taneka—and she was right! I liked them. And still do! And the fact that she was bringing in writers with different sorts of experience told me that she wanted to do some exploring. I don't know! I can't speak for Rebecca. But it seemed to me that she wanted to emphasize the newness of what we were doing as much as the continuity. We even broke the POV rule toward the end.

Taneka: I was quietly terrified (in the best of ways). *Steven Universe* is a beautiful show with many storylines and a strong group of writers who have already helped to shape it. Not only was this the first show I have ever been staffed on, it was my introduction to animation after shaping most of my career in comics. However, Rebecca not only made me feel completely welcomed to this well-seasoned family; they made me feel like I had a story to tell To have that kind of generosity extended, especially to characters most would feel are already figured out, it was beautiful to realize that was not the end of the story. It was a new beginning for a lot of Gems, new and old. Also, I've made friends who will last my lifetime, and I learned so much in a short amount of time—it was an amazing experience that only a true leader could tailor, and Rebecca did just that.

Kate Tsang [writer]: Like Taneka, it was my first animation writing job, and I had anxiety about jumping onto such an established, lore-heavy show, which I also happened to be a fan of. I had those new-kid-in-school jitters, but it turns out everyone in this school is pretty darn nice. Also, Rebecca wanted *Future* to be the start of a new chapter in Steven's life, which gave us the freedom to explore all sorts of new possibilities (like Jack's giant talking space oyster—just keep reading, it'll make sense). It was kind of scary, but exciting. And, new or old, we were all exploring uncharted territory together.

Maya: Not gonna lie, I like playing in the box with other people's ideas. I like established rules So I definitely struggled a little bit when my first opportunity to board on the show was *Future*! I remember feeling embarrassed often that the ideas I would suggest were too steeped in old *Steven Universe* conventions.

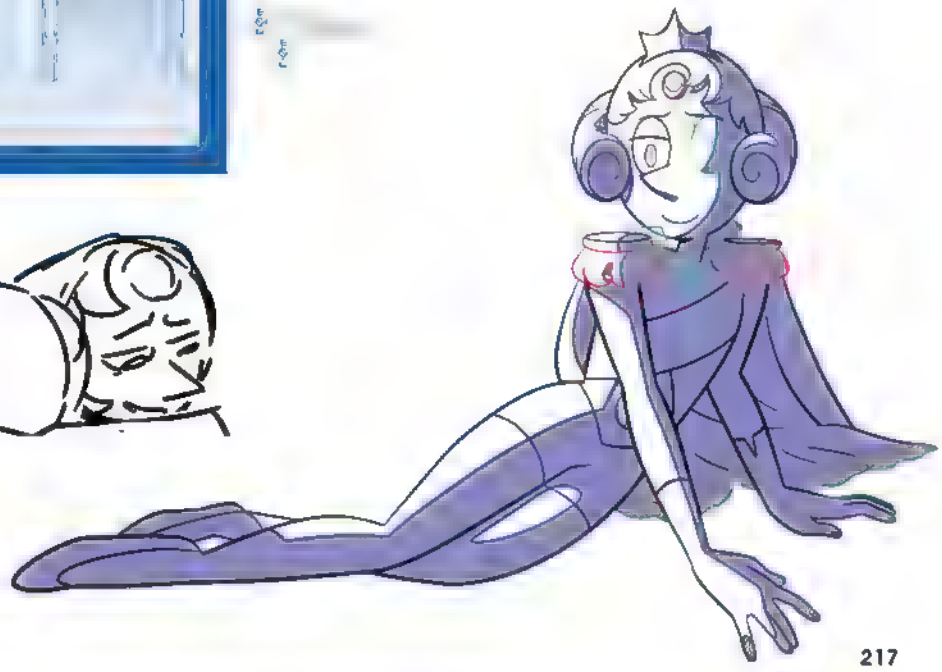
That said, the show is still the same at its core: kind, funny without being mean-spirited, about love and communication. I can't overstate how great a privilege it is to work on a show that is tried and true, and that has such cultural resonance and significance! I haven't worked on a property in its fledgling stages yet, but I imagine there's a lot of stress in wondering if there's even an audience for your work's message and tone. But *Steven* was clearly working!

At first, I wasn't too excited about exploring Steven's unraveling. [*Laughs.*] I had been wrestling so long with my own feelings of purposelessness and directionlessness that I came out of the *Future* writers' retreat kind of dreading having to sit with these themes for five weeks and for more hours each day than I already was.

(Continued on page 220)

1
2
3
4
5
6

Character design exploration and model artwork of Mega Pearl from the episode "Volleyball" by Becky Dreistadt. Reef concept designs by Steven Sugar. Storyboards by Joe Johnston.



1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 458

Scene 175 Panel 3

Action Notes
(PAGE 1 CONSTANT SLOW TRUCK OUT ON THE BACKGROUND)
and
ANIMATED SPEED LINES ON THE GROUND)

Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 458

Scene 175 Panel 4

Action Notes
Retain Ch's main frame BG
Steven emerges from dust & dust
Steven palpates dwarf toe

(SPACE 1 CONSTANT SLOW TRUCK OUT ON THE BACKGROUND)
and
ANIMATED SPEED LINES ON THE GROUND)

Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 459

Scene 175 Panel 5

Dialog
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

Action Notes
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

Staging
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 459

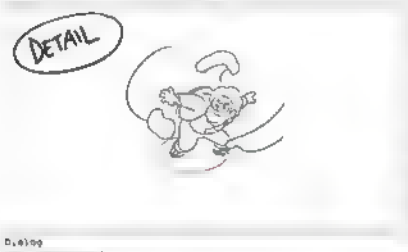
Scene 175 Panel 6

Action Notes
dust starts to dissipate

Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 460

Scene 175 Panel 7



Dialog
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

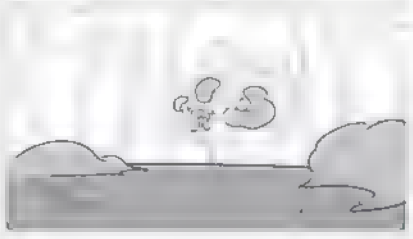
Action Notes
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

Staging
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 Volleyball Page 460

Scene 175 Panel 8



Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 461

Scene 175 Panel 9

Dialog
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

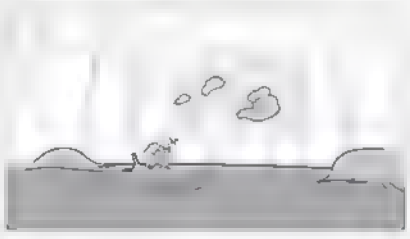
Action Notes
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

Staging
DETAIL FOR REFERENCE

Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 Volleyball Page 461

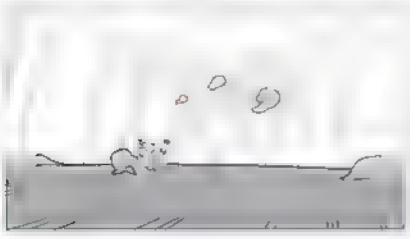
Scene 175 Panel 10



Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 462

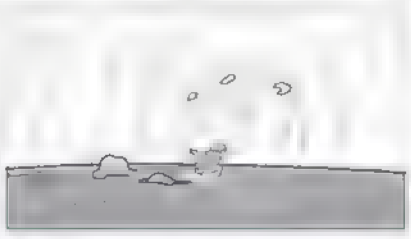
Scene 175 Panel 11



Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 462

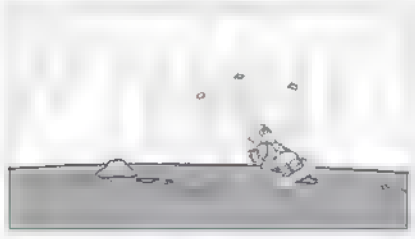
Scene 175 Panel 12



Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 463

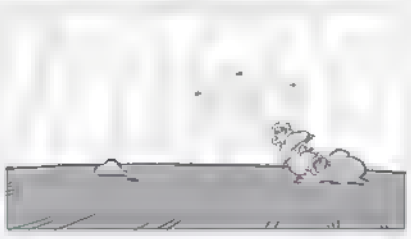
Scene 175 Panel 13



Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

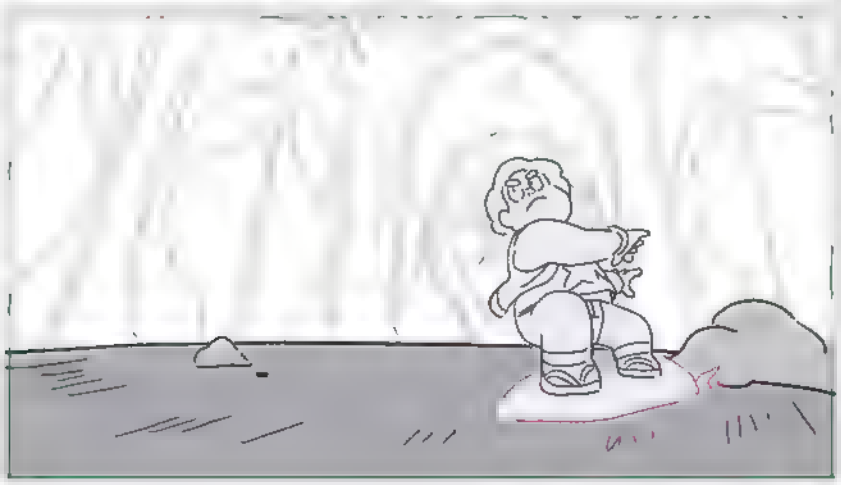
1077-166 "Volleyball" Page 463

Scene 175 Panel 14

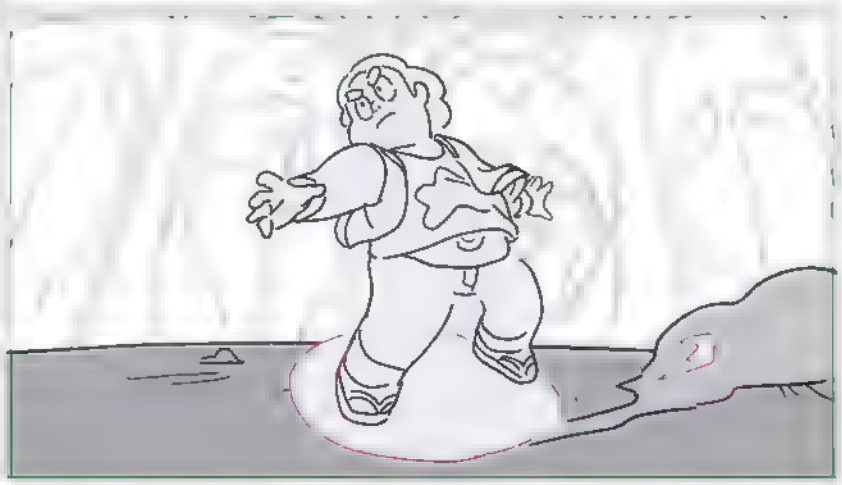


Cartoon Network Studios - Steven Universe

Scene 175 Panel 15

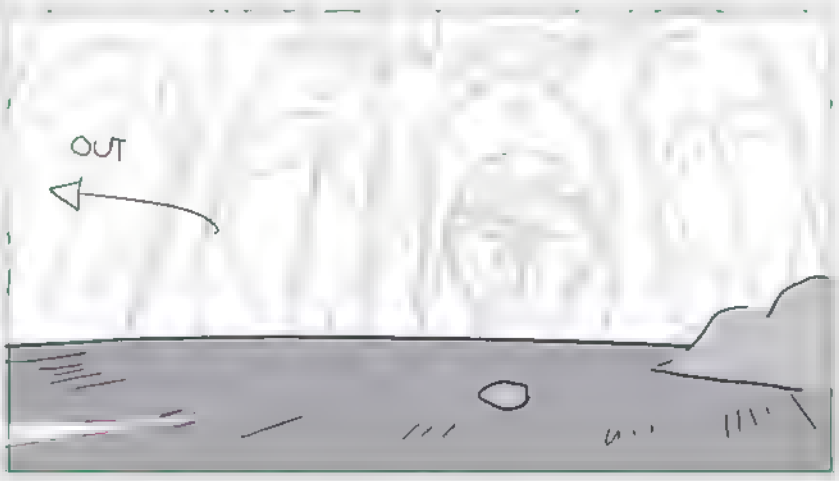


Scene 175 Panel 16



Scene 175 Panel 17

Scene 175 Panel 18



Action Notes
Steven exits WEST

Example of action-packed storyboarding from "Volleyball" by Etienne Gaignard

(Continued from page 215)

So I put forth the idea of Steven feeling so desperate and isolated, with his judgment so compromised, that he'd rather live vicariously through Connie—through being Stevonnie. I thought it was too edgy for anyone to take seriously, and I don't know why I tried to make things harder for myself, but we ended up doing an episode about that very idea! And it was actually therapeutic.

Aside from Steven, I had long held on to this head canon [personal fan story ideas about a (usually) commercial property, (usually) not under the fan's control] that pearls were manufactured on an ocean planet or moon with giant bivalves. I was super lucky to get to conceptualize a pearl factory with Etienne [Guignard, storyboard artist] as our first board assignment ["Volleyball"]. I remember being excited to tackle Volley's story, too. The idea of downplaying the harm someone has done because "they couldn't help it" or "it was an accident"—that someone can traumatize you even if they didn't outright abuse you, and that psychological damage can eventually manifest as physical injury—was pretty close to home. I hope we lent authenticity to that.

Jack: Maya! You will be glad to hear that the phrase "giant talking space oyster" came out of my mouth a lot in meetings, though my thoughts were patiently guided elsewhere.

Taneka: Yes, guided elsewhere indeed, Jack. Personally, I was overjoyed to explore all the characters because of the time skip! Talk about a whole new world. I especially wanted to see how Connie would further develop as an individual and was curious if her aging and maturity would continue to reflect through Stevonnie.

When we first join Steven again, early on in *Future*, he is feeling overworked and ineffective, little more than a figurehead around the Little Homeschool that he is running. He is learning that he must trust what others are doing there and step back from micromanaging every detail. For example, Amethyst has helped place Gems in new Earth jobs. In a shock to Steven's good intentions, he realizes that many Gems choose to perform jobs on Earth similar to their previous Gem experience—because they want to. Steven undermines Amethyst's organization, thinking his approach will open the Gems' eyes to new experiences, a sort of forced experimentation for growth. What he doesn't bother to ask about is how Amethyst made her job assignments for each Gem in the first place: She asked them what they wanted.

Steven then steps away from the school and turns toward personal hobbies.

Drew: Steven has this reliance on what I like to call "depression hobbies" in the episode "Prickly Pair" [S1E10]. Your experience of the world around you is out of your control, so you focus on something you can control, like gardening, and you typically put your entire self into that thing to ignore outside influences and your own feelings. I knew this all too well going into the episode—I have a piano I still don't really know how to play—and as a result, it's probably the one I'm most happy with.

Maya: "Depression hobbies" is such a good way of putting it! In dealing with depression, it's actually healthy to shift your focus away from yourself and toward others. There's a point at which you can become dependent on that as a distraction from your own issues, though. Maybe I'm projecting, but I think Steven derived his whole identity—and maybe a little bit of a martyr complex—from sorting out other people's problems, and he got a sense of control from that.

I know Rose had Steven so that he could make his own choices as a human, but he really still had a magical destiny anyway, didn't he? While it was traumatic for a fourteen-year-old child, there's comfort and certainty associated with destiny—or knowing what's expected of you. I think we get that from our many years in school, from grueling jobs; they're a framework.

The Crystal Gems fuse and shape-shift into many flavors of Steven in the episode "Snow Day" Model designs by Becky Dreistadt and color by Ashley Fischer.

The major storylines have been resolved. The other characters are living their own lives and evolving, off screen, independent of Steven's intervention or influence. That feeling of not being able to play a role that was largely decided for you anymore and having to get in your own head and figure out your own biz is scary-relatable.

Steven's stress begins to build, and he loses control of himself and his powers, as even newer manifestations of them are still revealing themselves. He now has super-speed, pink domes and walls that he can't totally manage, and an uncontrollable case of swelling and glowing. Steven's temper shows itself in several examples of teenage rage. Steven's anger, however, is more dangerous than most, as his outbursts tend to create impact craters.

One temporary solution Steven finds is to seclude himself away from everything and hole up with Jasper in the woods, whether she's a willing host or not. Inevitably, some awesome battling commences. Steven and Jasper both underestimate his well of untapped Diamond power, and the episode ends with Steven bursting back into the beach house, desperately mixing the Diamond elixirs to repair her shattered gem.

Steven's uncontrollable powers provided an opportunity for all sorts of kinetic on-screen action, such as the cinematic fight scenes with Jasper.

Jack: I liked it when Etienne would pitch action sequences. He did all the sound effects—even things you'd never expect, like Steven's heartbeat getting faster, the sound of someone running through the snow, the whoosh of a leap through the air. It was great entertainment!

Drew: Etienne's pitches were the best! He's incredible at really exciting, dynamic action—a fabulous animator. I guess I'd never really looked at *Steven Universe* as an action show before. The drama, the deep and nuanced emotional interactions and themes, the humor—those things really colored the show for me. Maybe there is a lot of action in *Future*, but I don't feel like we lost those other important elements in the process. Steven's feelings are really intense during these episodes, so it made a lot of sense to have him express them in an equally intense way.

Maya: Etienne and Miki's boards made *Steven Universe* the action show the fans knew it was meant to be! Joking aside, the whole thing is more kinetic. There's more action per square foot, but the pacing is also faster.

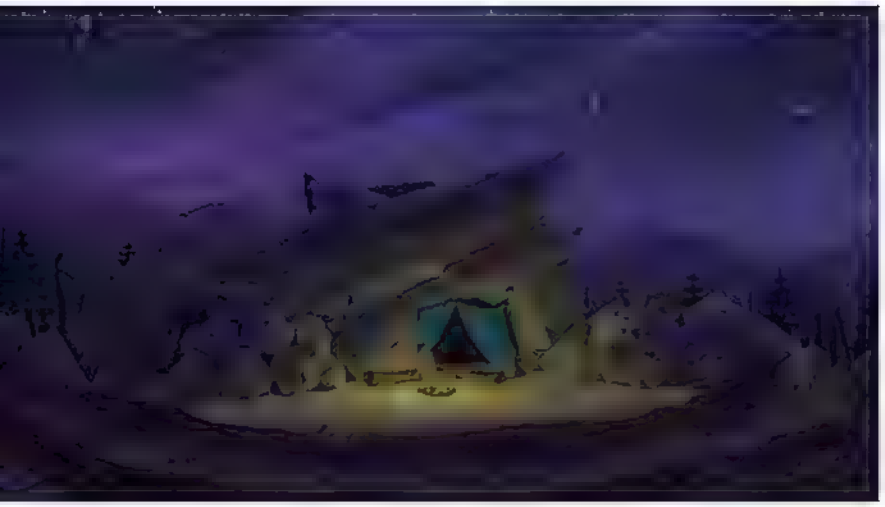
My impression as a fan and a viewer was that up to this point, *Steven Universe* was more leisurely, to its benefit. Change didn't come about immediately, and reveals were often slow and subtle, sometimes distorted and unreliable. So I went into boarding expecting this pace. *Future* is a departure from the rest of the series, and a lot more information and character development had to be conveyed in the space of eleven minutes this season. Sometimes I felt like I was boarding a different show than the one I watched. Intentional or not, this more hurried pace works to underline Steven's anxious thoughts and the general atmosphere of mental un-health. Things are changing faster than Steven can process and accept them.

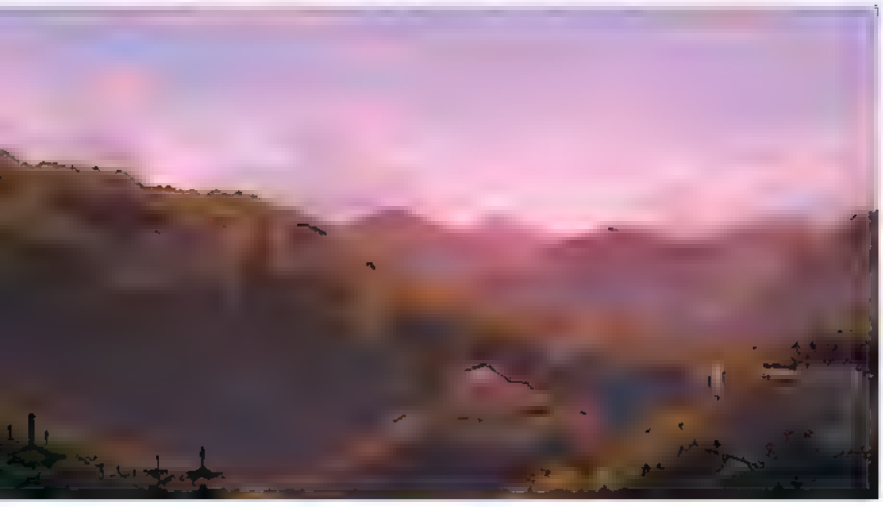
Adding to Steven's traumatic experiences, he even loses some of the romantic vision that he has held on to about Greg, his father, his whole life. In the opening of the episode "Mr. Universe" (S1E15), Greg and Steven are mysteriously rifling through a house that they've snuck in to. Only after seeing a family photo in a frame does Steven realize, and Greg admit, that they are in Steven's grandparents' home, in Greg's old bedroom.

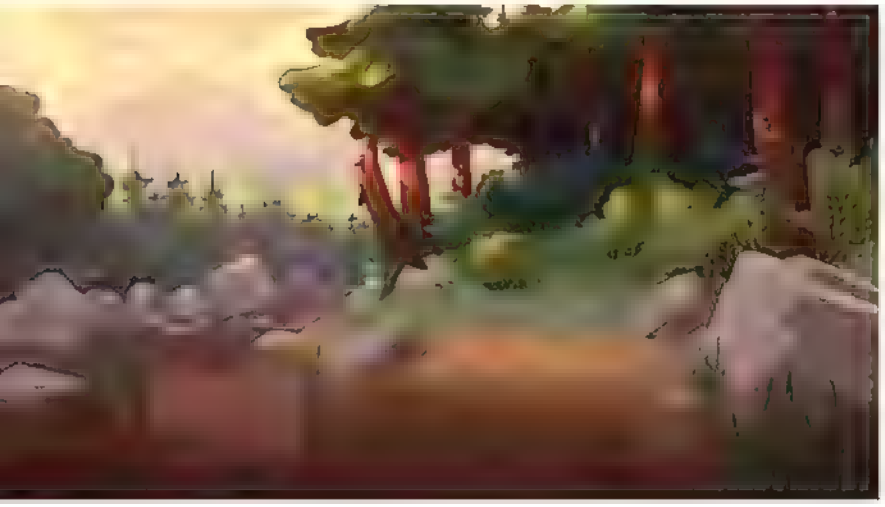
Greg is searching for a CD that helped him break free of the ties of family and venture out on his own many years before, because he thinks this could be inspirational for Steven's own journey. But Steven is upset when he realizes that Greg's parents, whom he has not heard a lot about, were apparently not guilty of much more than stifling Greg with their suburban lifestyle, being unsupportive of Greg's creative interests, and serving meatloaf for

(Continued on page 224)

This page: A color script is a painting tool used to establish the overall mood and visual direction of a film sequence. Here, expressive landscapes are explored and fine-tuned by Melissa King, a production designer who works with a team of artists to develop the look of the film. **Opposite:** Preliminary fragments by Ward Jenkins, Howard Lang, and Alex Mwangi. Background paintings by Patrick Jarvis, Charles Hilton, Melissa King, and Ward Jenkins.







(Continued from page 221)

dinner too often. Steven claims Greg is just as bad as Rose was—running from family, depriving him of a... of it. When a young person's last, most fundamental illusions about their parents are punctured with a sharp vision of reality, it can be painful and disorienting.

Steven's inner turmoil is relatable. The feelings of exhaustion, stress, and lack of control are common. Behind the scenes, as far back as the earliest seasons of production, the negative reactions to the show in some public spheres began to build a kind of background radiation that eventually did affect crew members, including Ian and Rebecca.

Ian: It's always difficult when you put yourself out there. For example, when the show came out, Common Sense Media, a foundation purporting to be "the leading source of entertainment and technology recommendations for families and schools," posted a now-removed review that went on at length about how *Steven Universe* has bad role models because "A black character wears an oversize Afro and has ample, curvy thighs; a loud-mouthed woman's plumped lips and tight-fitting clothing add to the effect of her crud.ty" and more insulting things. I remember thinking, "People in my life look like these characters." I'm reminded of the women in my life when I see these characters. People with large lips exist. People who have Afros exist. It's tough when you're putting your personal experiences out there and people are telling you that your body is not real or harmful just because of who you are—it can be scary sometimes.

Characterizing lip size, hairstyle, or body shape as offensive betrays a belief that specific features like these should never be found in a cartoon.

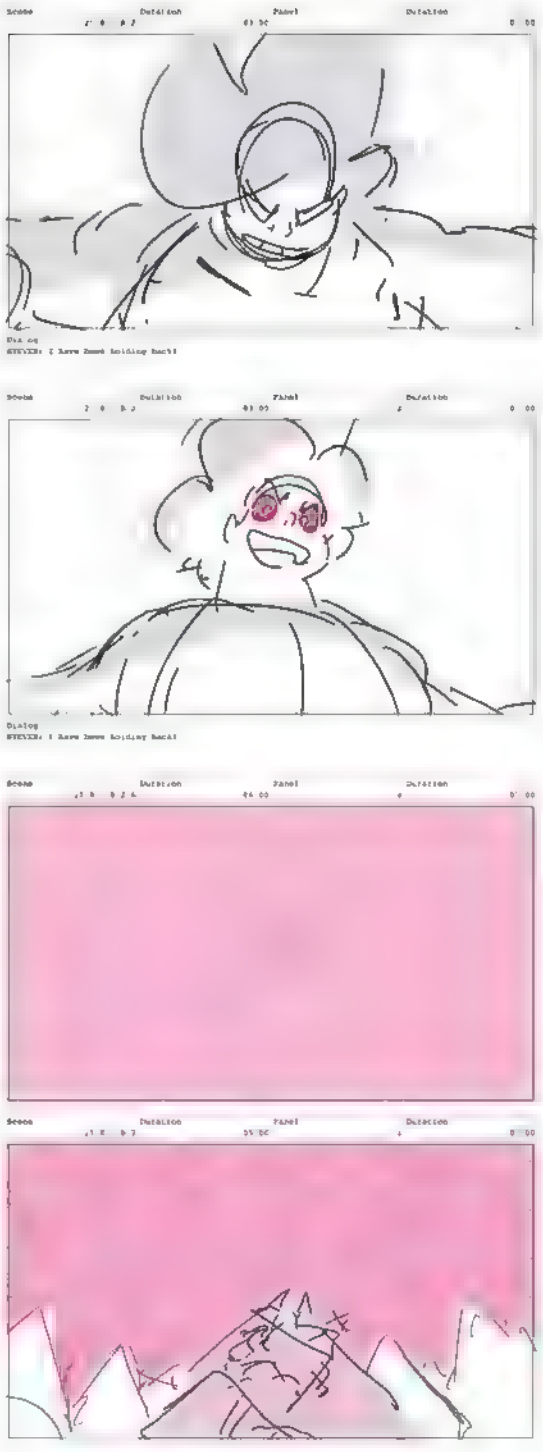
Ian: For instance, there's a page on TV Tropes about Afros, and it's written in this super-gross, looking down-their-nose way. It's like, "Afros are funny. A particularly large one, no matter how awesome, can be a liability." It's just painful, but the mainstream nerd culture is kind of like that, so what can you do?

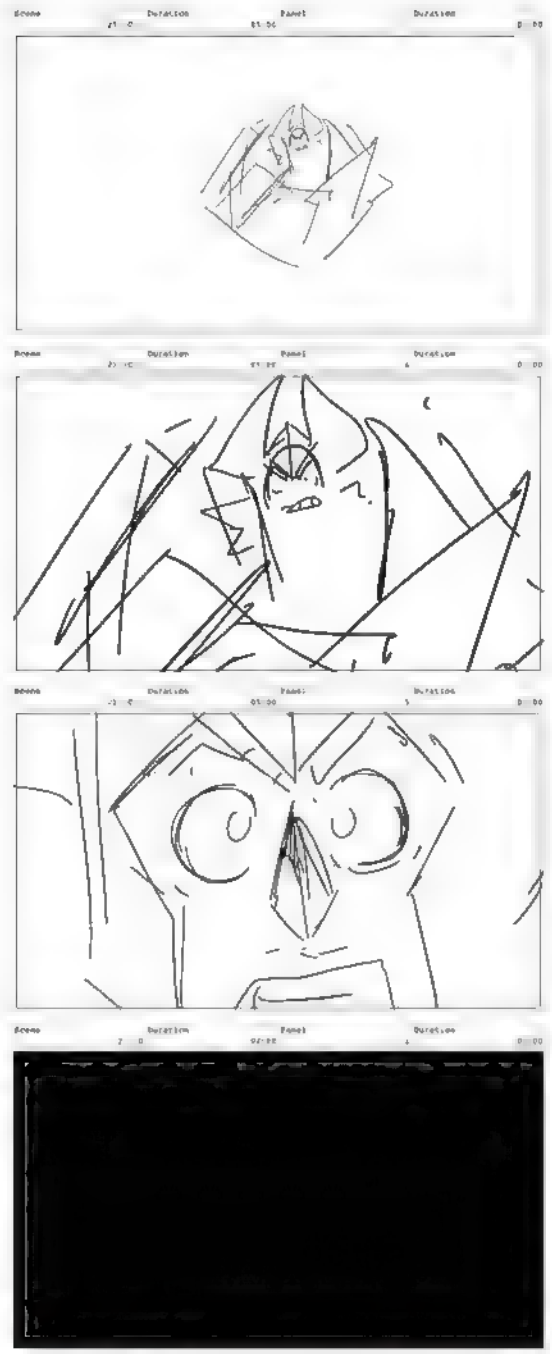
Certain outliers in the *Steven Universe* fan base had been increasingly creating a negative environment online, on social media, and in cartoon fan circles. Struggling with a sense of powerlessness over the situation, Rebecca sought help.

Rebecca: This was probably a big turning point, around the time of "Mindful Education" [S4E4] [in which Rebecca tried to address some of these problems by sharing her feelings with the audience about the positive power of mindful meditation through the characters in the show].

I knew about Cartoon Network's Stop Bullying: Speak Up campaign and began to ask if there was any way I could get in touch with whoever they were working with to craft their messaging. I wanted to speak to the psychologists. Part of this had to do with how much fighting there was among the fan base, which was really distressing for me; I did not know what to do. People would be fighting over characters or stories that, because of the delay in making animation, we would have written, in some cases, several years earlier. We would have boarded these episodes a year before and finished them months before, so I couldn't *do* anything. When people would say, "I identify with Jasper, so nothing bad can happen to her or else I'm going to think that I'm a worthless person," I didn't know what to do. I wasn't sure how to stop this infighting, so I contacted the expert through some of the executives. I said, "I really care about navigating bullying issues responsibly within the show. This is a real problem; cyberbullying is a real problem, and I want to know how to address this."

They put me in touch with Bradley Snyder, Cartoon Network's resident specialist in child well-being and bullying prevention. I learned *a lot* from him that informed the rest of the show. I had been living in fear, unsure what I should or shouldn't show, wondering, "Is it harmful to be depicting conflict? What's setting a bad example?" And what I learned is that the difference between bullying and interpersonal conflict is that a bully





It's lights out for Jasper (and worse) in this sequence of rough storyboards from "Fragments" by Miki Brewster.

actually actively enjoys hurting someone. And all of a sudden everything became clearer, especially what I was witnessing in the fan base, because I could finally spot the difference between arguments about the story and statements that were meant to cause harm.

I would ask, "How does the victim of bullying retaliate? What can they say or do to make the bullying stop?" because I wanted to show examples of that in the show: Steven is often a character who's vulnerable—he's often under attack. "What can Steven do, when he's the victim of bullying, that is right and that would be helpful for children to see?"

What I learned was that the victim of bullying should not respond directly to the bully at all, which is a very frustrating situation. You really want to think that if you could just say or do the right thing, then you could take control of that situation. The thing is that the bully is excited when they're upsetting the victim. So for the victim to stand up and say, "I'm being affected by you, and what you're doing is riling me up or making me angry," or "You're hurting my feelings, and I just need to reason with you"—all those things don't work, because it means that the bully succeeded in co-opting control of this person's life and puppeting them into having a reaction.

That's enjoyable for the bully.

The only way that you can deal with it is to acknowledge that the bully is doing it so that they can assert some sort of dominance that they think will impress other people. They want to come out on top of the situation and show that someone else is bad because they're actually good. And if the peer group watching says, "Hey, that didn't impress us at all—that was a really messed-up thing that you did. You shouldn't treat people that way," that's the truly effective way to defeat a bully. In the cases of younger kids, that's what parents and teachers need to do: present themselves as authority figures and say to the bully, "What you're doing is inappropriate."

I started thinking about the way I approached these stories. If you're a person who is getting hurt, and your parents agree with the hurtful things—if you're in a space that is not sympathetic to you or your hurt—that kind of support can't happen. Which is why it's so important to find community.

What I also learned from these conversations with Bradley is that a bully will try to make you believe things about yourself that aren't true. The dangerous thing is when you start to believe that those negative things said about you *are* true. Apparently the "self-esteem approach" is now pretty outdated, and the focus has shifted to self awareness. You need to be self aware of your strengths and weaknesses. If somebody says, "Maybe you shouldn't have said that," or "You could stand to work on these aspects of your drawing," then that's not necessarily bullying—that could be constructive criticism. What you really want is to have a clear understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses. And that foundation will allow you to be unphased when someone comes out of the woodwork and says something cruel. You know that this is just a person who is trying to make you believe something about yourself that's not true, because they are a bully.

"Change Your Mind" became very much about that; it's about someone who is trying to make Steven believe something about himself that is not true. I related to that particular aspect of bullying when I heard about it from my experiences as a teenager, and it's something that I think is relatable to a lot of LGBTQIA+ kids and teens: A lot of times people who are in positions of authority are telling you things about yourself that aren't true. They might not know they're saying something hurtful; they might have picked it up from the ether, since this is a massive societal problem—we're in a society that has been systematically hurting us for a very, very long time. So there may be peer groups whose members all believe and repeat false, hurtful ideas. And if a kid is caught up in that, with no one to say, "This is a societal problem," they could end up thinking it's their problem.

Because of what I learned about bullying, I really started to think about the peer-group support

network, and about how I wanted the show to provide that. I wanted us, the team, to reach out through the show and be those peers, be that voice that cuts through the cruelty and says, Don't listen to them—you make sense. You don't deserve to be treated like this. And if someone is manipulating you, making you cry, misgendering you, taking their anger out on you, they are one hundred percent, unequivocally, ridiculously wrong. They are displacing their own shame, their own baggage, on to you, and that is their problem, not yours. You really are the only authority on yourself, so you don't have to listen to someone who's telling you that you're not yourself, because they don't know you as well as you do.

Throughout the series, people have connected with the show fiercely. It might be because the show is in fact acting as part of their peer group, their community—a community member in a position of authority, a major show on television.

Rebecca: The series is such a reflection of the team. Though we're all coming from different places and different points of view, because we're coexisting together in order to make this, we have to achieve a certain level of understanding and appreciate each other.

Over the years, the series has introduced so many characters and their individual threads. With only twenty episodes to wrap things up, there were going to be some tough decisions on whom to check in with one last time. *Future* does a good job of putting a cap on the stories of a lot of characters, and even manage to introduce some new ones. Inevitably, though, some questions remain unanswered, and so many fertile story possibilities had to be set aside.

Jack: We went a pretty long way toward developing a really interesting story about Rhodonite. It was *too* good, if that makes sense. Too rich! I mean, the deeper we dug into it, the more there was to the story. It started to seem like a two-parter, I think, and we didn't have that much time to spare, considering everything we were putting poor Steven through.

Also, it would have been nice to have Steven visit Lars in space. There was a cheeseburger tree that Joe [Johnston] was championing—Lars searching for a mythical cheeseburger tree in space. Rebecca shot that down instantly and with glee! Honestly, I don't know if Joe *really* loved the cheeseburger tree or if, after a while, he was just having fun, getting Rebecca to laugh and wince. But once, much later, the phrase "hamburger backpack" appeared in an outline, and Rebecca made a little correction on the side of the page: "Cheeseburger." And Joe put a note under that, which said "tree." I took a screenshot of it so I could keep it forever.

The "extra" Lars episode would have also been nice because we were planning to include some clues about Diamond prehistory and/or Gem religion, I suppose you could call it. Very, very early on, there was the idea of the final four episodes consisting of a cosmic journey into the origins of the Diamonds and Gem culture. There was a remnant of that in the Lars idea, and then that episode fell by the wayside and a lot of these secret ideas went away with it. So that's something else that changed as the complicated, intense nature of Steven's own arc became apparent.

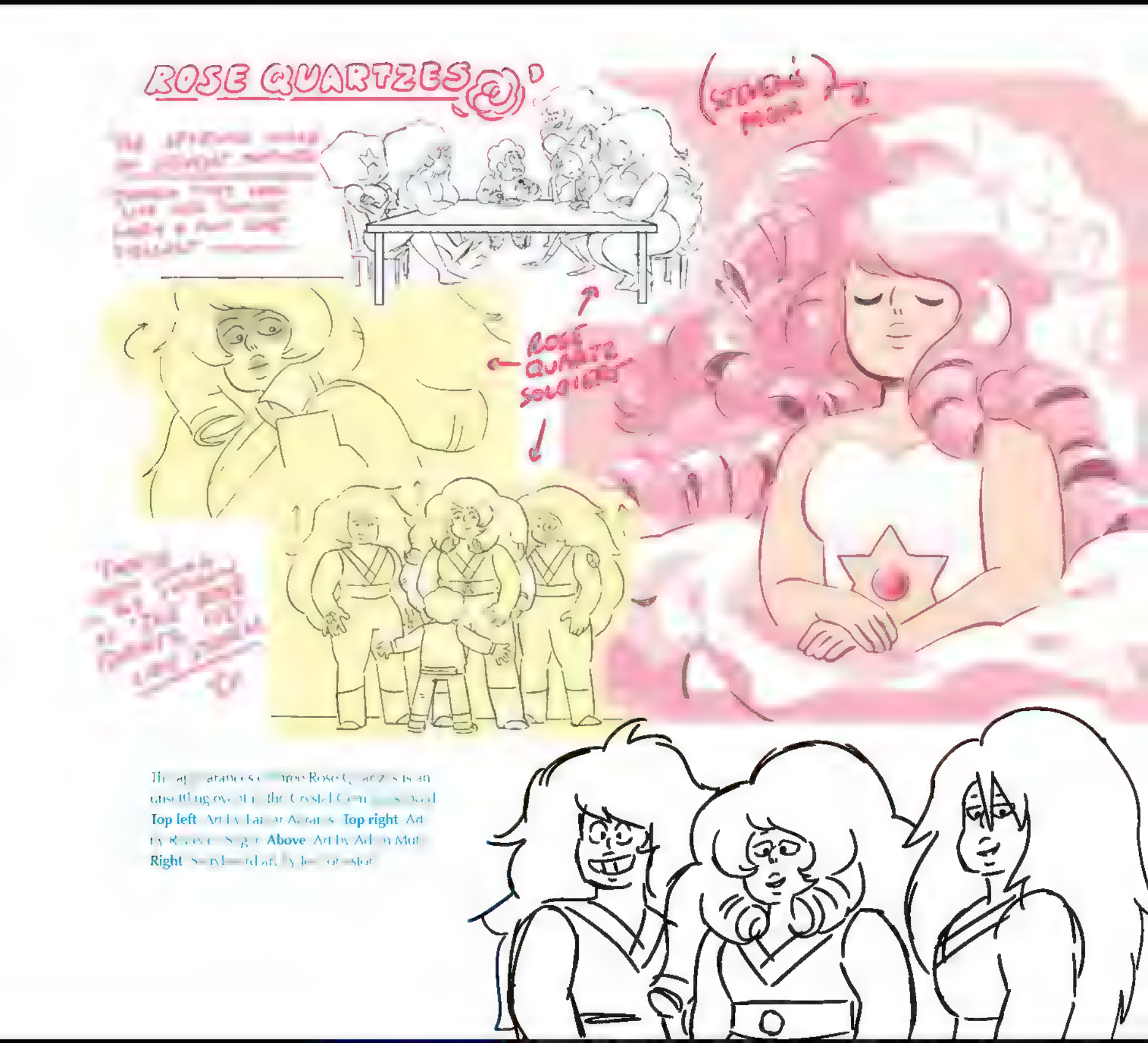
Taneka: Rebecca drew some amazing sketches for the Rhodonite episode we wrote. They included a character I personally wanted to write more about, which was Morganite. It was great to be able to break that story even if it wasn't added to the final twenty. I believe the interest in the past and in Diamond lore is something everyone wanted to see incorporated, because it would help us come full circle into the future!

Kate: We also bounced around an idea early on about Steven going into space for a multi-episode arc where he learns about the birthplace of the Diamonds. But we ended up going in a direction that was more fitting for Steven's journey. We've

(Continued on page 229)

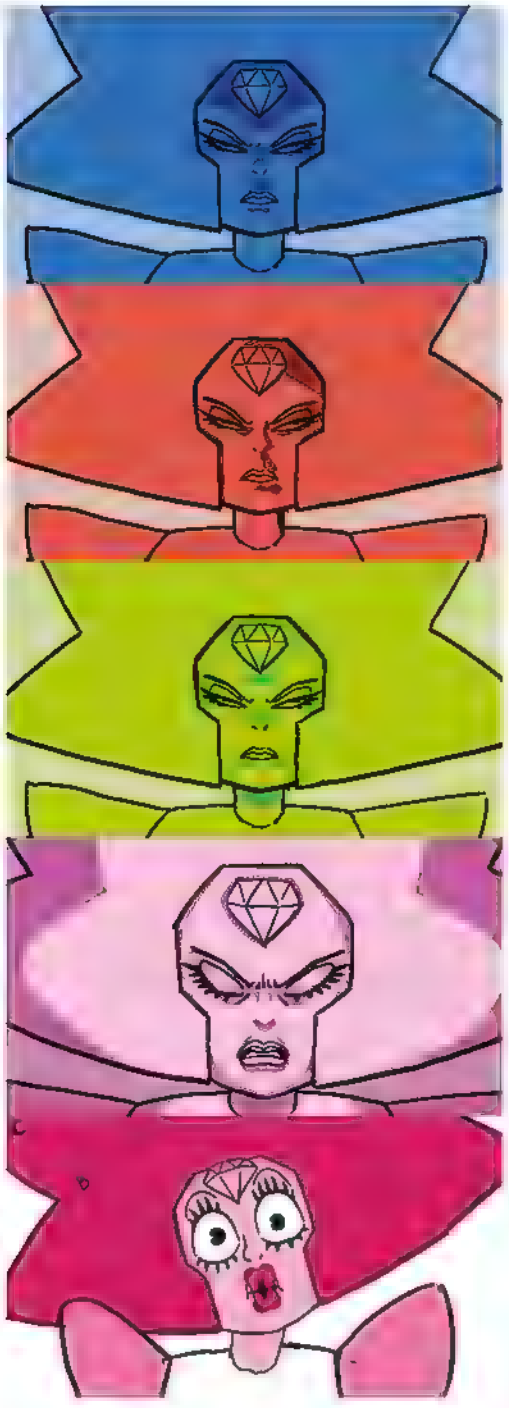
Top A cherished screenshot of an outline document from the collection of writer Jack Pendarvis. **Above** Concept art by Rebecca Sugar of the character Morganite, whose stories will presumably have to remain untold.

ROSE QUARTZES



The appearance of more Rose Quartzes is an unsettling event in the Crystal Gem universe. **Top left** Art by Lamar Abrams. **Top right** Art by Rebecca Sugar. **Above** Art by Adam Muhlbauer. **Right** Storyboard art by Jesse Dorsey.

Bluebird is a fusion of Aquamarine and Ruby (Eyeball), who make their appearance in "Bluebird" to wreak havoc on Steven. Greg's rocks do not survive the episode. **Top**: Final Bluebird model by Becky Dreistadt. **Right**: Concept art by Rebecca Sugar



Above. Storyboard art from "Homeward Bound" by Paul Villeco

(Continued from page 226)

had a lot of time to watch Steven learn about his Gem side. *Future* is about Steven exploring his human side, so keeping him on Earth felt right.

Rebecca: With *Future*, we were originally planning on delving into Gem origins. We always nod to it: Gems are obviously technology, and they have their own extensive mythology. (Way back during Peridot's arc, I kept trying to find a spot for her to "Linus," like in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*—to recite a long, religious Gem monologue.) But we were having trouble finding the emotional pulse to complement that exposition. As we were having our earliest talks about *Future*, out of the blue I heard from Bradley Snyder, the expert from CN's stop-bullying campaign. He gave me a book called *The Deepest Well*, by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, in hopes that it might help inform the PSA-style self-esteem shorts I was writing for Dove at the time. This book struck a huge chord with me, especially the idea of the emotional and physical being so inexorably linked, the toll that adverse childhood experiences take on someone's physical, social, and emotional development, but most of all, the healing power of awareness and care. To read so much hard evidence on the actual healing effects of love and kindness truly blew my mind. I was so inspired.

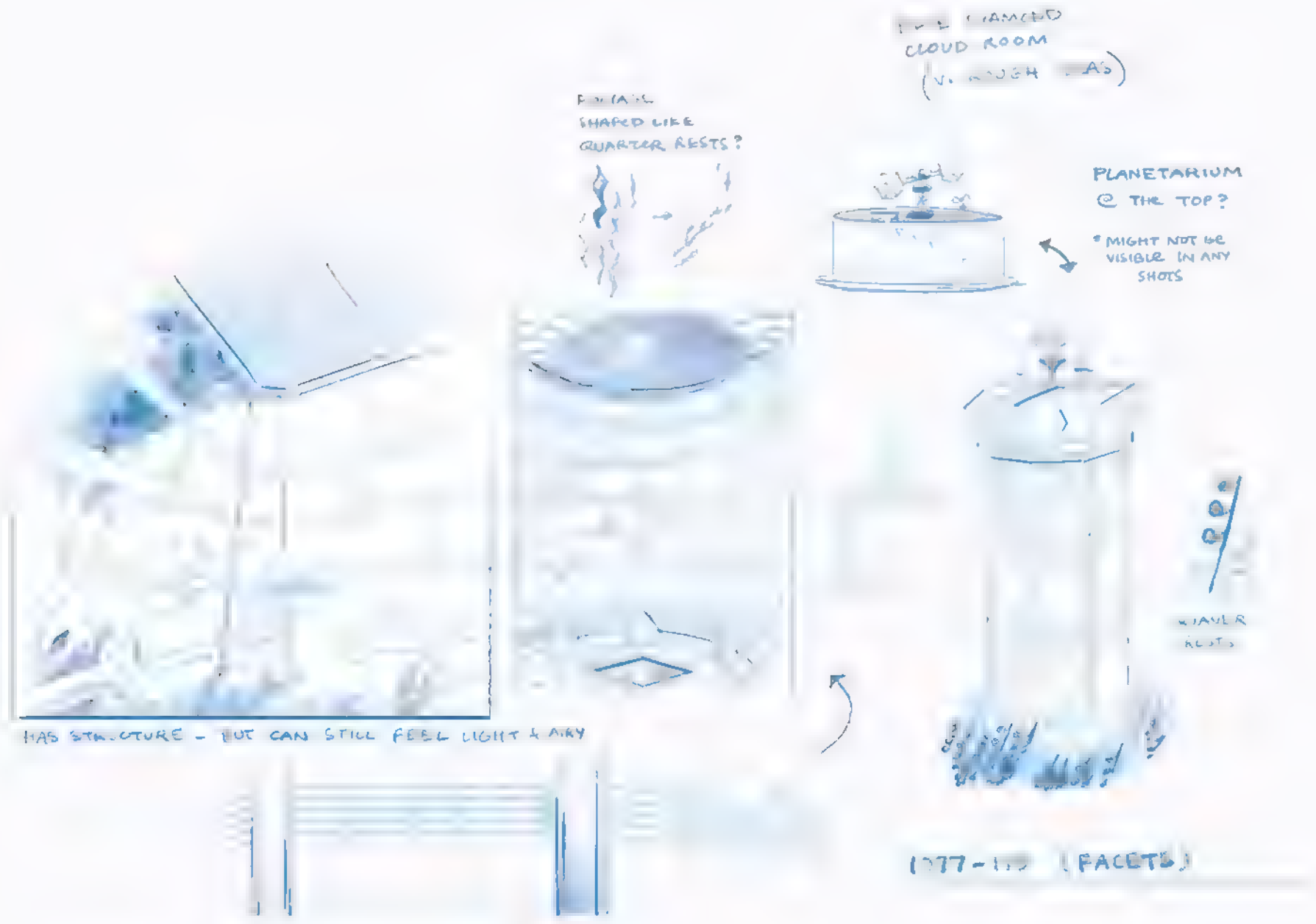
This, and also some conversations I was having with Zach [Callison, Steven's voice actor] at the time, started to solidify *Future* in my mind. Like Steven as a character, we all needed to acknowledge what we'd been through and figure out how to let go.

Rebecca has discussed her "reverse escapism" concept that informed the show many times over. The idea was that this particular fantastical science-fiction story would center around a group of rebel aliens on Earth . . . who were fascinated by routine domestic life and navigating the emotional world of human beings. But by the time the crew was working on *Future*, there was an evolution.

Rebecca: My feelings changed toward escapism, which was baked into the premise of the show. We initially had wanted to flip escapism on its head. The show would look like an escapist fantasy, but it would ask the audience to confront complex, realistic personal problems head-on instead of being a way to avoid them. But by the end of it, I just felt different. The whole thing had been so difficult that I really began to understand what it means to need something that makes you feel better.

I also realized that there were so many things in the show that fulfilled wishes of my own. There really is so much escapism in the show. I had come to associate "escapism" with heteronormative, male fantasies, usually with all-white leads, which I had seen many times in movies and on TV. Now that I understand how rare it is for a marginalized person to create a piece of mainstream media, I understand why I thought that's all escapism could be. These stories were a reflection of the dreams of the people who made them, which is fantastic, of course—I would want nothing less than an honest piece of art from whoever might make it—but I couldn't necessarily relate to those fantasies. I could never really get into stories where a human being goes to an alien planet and they become more magic, more special, and more powerful than ever before. This Tarzan-style fantasy exists in stark contrast to, say, Superman, which is distinctly Jewish, with nods to the immigrant experience and the story of Moses, where the fantasy is that somehow, someone will save us, and the alien does his best to blend in with earthlings. I always thought of Steven as being related to this legacy of secular Jewish American heroes. Deeper into the show, I began to think more and more often about the difference between these two types of fantasies. I wonder if the former, the *John Carters* and *Avatars*, are written by people who are tired of feeling ordinary. But we as marginalized creators have the opposite problem: the feeling of sticking out, the fear of being exposed, and the basic desire to be safe. The fantasy for me is to feel human. I already feel like an alien. I think the "reverse escapism" idea, for all my wild thoughts on it at the beginning, really boils down to that.

(Continued on page 236)

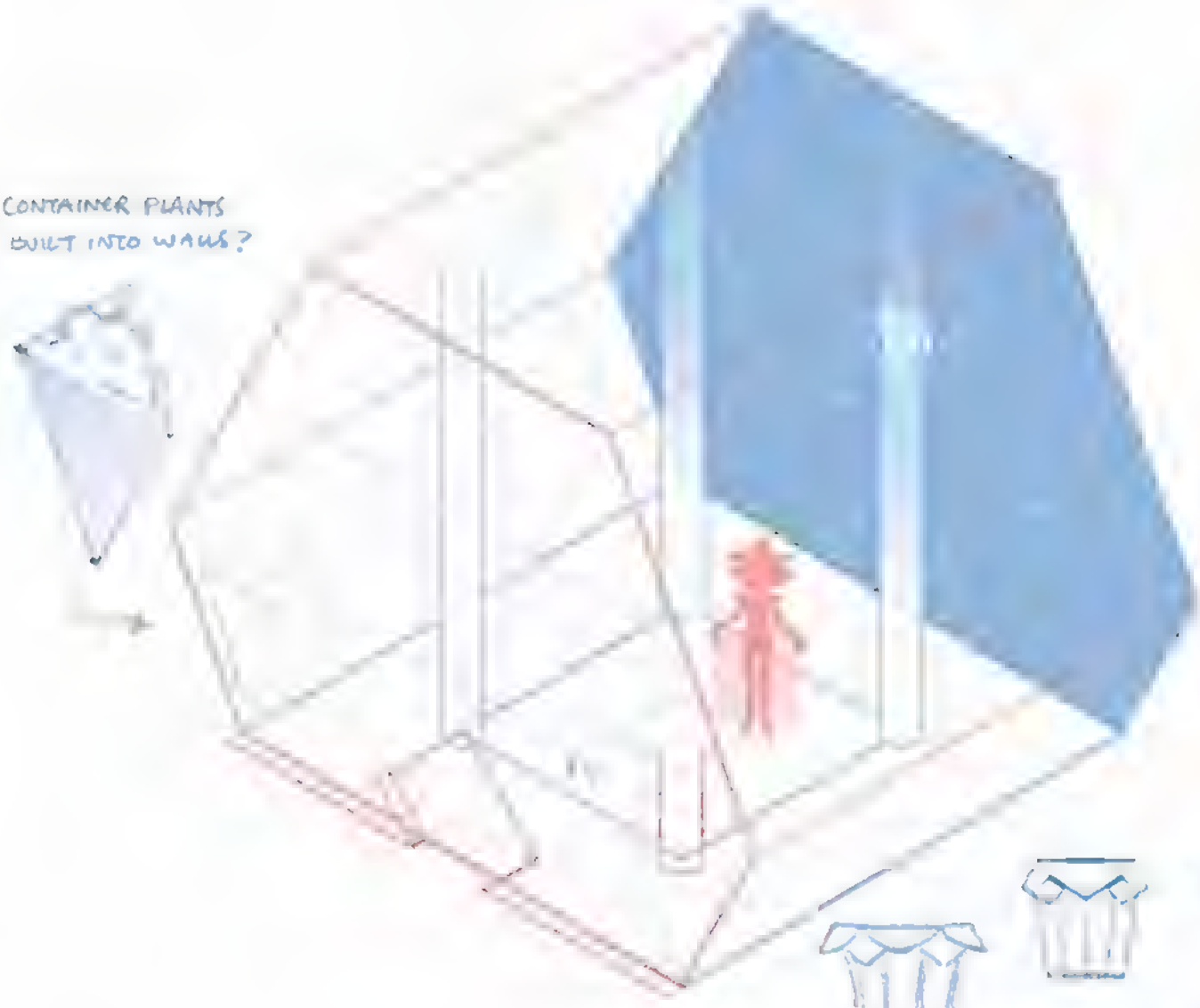


This spread
Homeworld concept art by Leonard Hung

BLUE DIAMOND
CLOUD ROOM
(V. ROUGH IDEAS)

*SHOULD BE
A PLACE TO
FOCUS THE MIND

CONTAINER PLANTS
BUILT INTO WALLS?



1077-179 (FACETS)

Art from "Homeworld Bound." **Above:** Storyboard art by Alonso Ramirez Ramos. **Left and opposite** Concept art by Leonard Hung. **Below:** Line art by Julian De Perio, Leonard Hung, and Alex Myung Background paint by Patrick Bryson, Laura Price, and Kat Tsai

Art from "Homeworld Bound." **Left:** Storyboard art by Hilary Florido. **Right** Background art by Julian De Perio. Color by Patrick Bryson.

(Continued from page 229)

"Love Like You," the ending credits song, is so much about all these themes, what we were talking about with Rose and Steven and all the Gems, and how difficult it is to just be present with other people and love other people when there are all these roadblocks to being comfortable with yourself.

Arvi & surasshu had written this beautiful piece of music and asked me to provide the lyrics and vocals, so I wrote the lyrics to this song over several years, and when I started, I thought it would be funny to make something that seemed deep and emotional but was secretly very sci-fi literal: a song from the perspective of an alien looking at a human being and marveling at their capacity to love. A year later, when I started writing the middle of the song, I was having an extremely difficult time both personally and on the show. I was overwhelmed by all the people looking up to me on the team and in my life, and I didn't feel worthy of it, and that became part of the lyrics. Then, years later, as we were finishing the song, I realized that the beginning was not a sci-fi alien concept at all. It was about how difficult it is when you think so little of yourself that you hold everyone else above you, and in doing so, you can never be close to them. I realized that the feeling so many of the characters embodied, that feeling of being an alien intruder, was making it impossible to do right by the people I cared about. This song is so special to me because it spanned the years it took for this to dawn on me and sink in.

"Love Like You"
If I could begin to be
Half of what you think of me
I could do about anything
I could even learn how to love
When I see the way you act
Wondering when I'm coming back
I could do about anything
I could even learn how to love
Like you

I always thought I might be bad
Now I'm sure that it's true
'Cause I think you're so good
And I'm nothing like you

Look at you go
I just adore you
I wish that I knew
What makes you think I'm so special

If I could begin to do
Something that does right by you
I would do about anything
I would even learn how to love

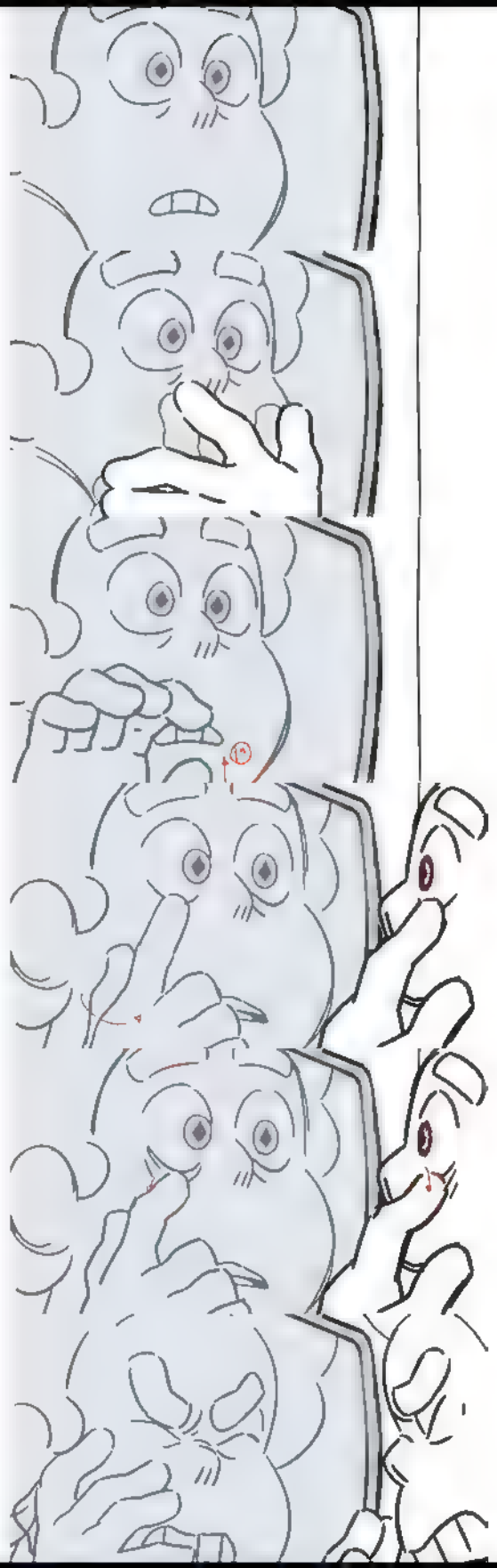
When I see the way you look
Shaken by how long it took
I could do about anything
I could even learn how to love like you

Love like you
Love me, like you

Even when you know yourself honestly, the fear of living and expressing your true self freely harbors a double layer of dread: the fear of how the world would potentially perceive and react to that true expression of self.

Rebecca: To have that feeling that if someone knew you better, they would like you less. What a horrifying thing to walk around with, you know? I felt that way for so long

During *Future*, I was still grappling with escapism. So much of *Future* returns to the early show idea of using fantasy to confront realistic human problems instead of to escape them. Our *Steven Universe* version of escapism is still there, I suppose, if Steven can get himself to a place where he can tap into it. His family is there, everyone loves him dearly, but he just can't connect to it — that's the "Love Like You" part of *Future*. The pedestal he's been put on is hurting him, feeling like he needs to stay up there in his own mind is making it harder for him. He needs to forgive himself for being in pain, and for being angry. He needs to be there for



himself and to take time for himself. I don't know, maybe time is an escapist idea after seven years of running this show—having a little time to myself is a fantasy.

Steven Universe evidently found audiences worldwide who were able to escape into its own brand of the fantastic, as Rebecca and Ian reflected on in an episode of *The Steven Universe Podcast*:

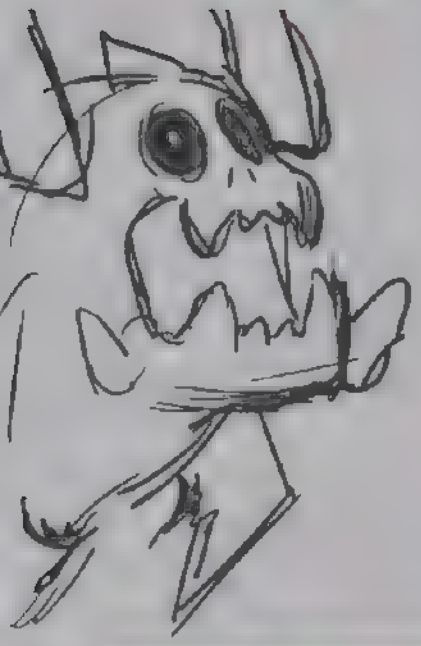
Ian: When you have something to say, you don't have to be hamstrung by the expectations of your genre or media or format. When people hear you're doing a science-fiction/fantasy thing, they get a certain image in their head based on things that they've seen in the past or stories that they've read before. And they think that fantasy means riding a dragon or something. For a lot of kids and people that I know, a fantasy can be as simple as "I want someone to tell me that it's OK that I exist," or "I want to be loved by somebody," or "I want to be in a family," or "I just want someone to care about me." That can be a fantasy also. There's a lot of value in having that be the main story that you tell. For a lot of people, they can't see that value because they don't see those things as a fantasy—but some of us really do. And if you have something to say about that, I don't think that you need to be afraid that "Well, this isn't going to satisfy somebody else's fantasy," because if you're telling a story, it's not about that; it's about *your* fantasy. I think that's something we all came to realize through working on the show

Rebecca: I had never seen escapist media that presented an environment that I wanted to escape into. And that's the thing; once I understood that, my contempt for escapism dissolved. Once I figured out that there is a place for me that I'd want to be—once I found that there was a dream that I get to have—it became a lot harder to resent things that weren't my dream, because it was like, "That's fine, it's somebody else's dream." But when you don't get to have one at all, it's just really hard to navigate everything

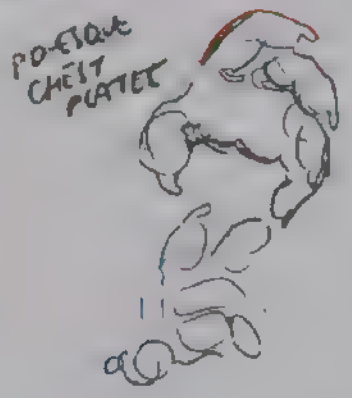
Ian: Yeah, a lot of people's idea of that stuff is escaping their mundane reality for a dream, but I think for a lot of people it's just to *have* a dream, and to get to be proud of that.

Rebecca: And to say it out loud.

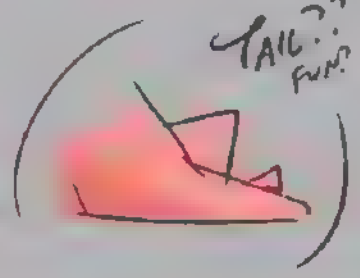
Opposite: Storyboard art from "Everything's Fine" by Rebecca Sugar, clean up by Leiana Nitura. **Left** Storyboard art from "I Am My Monster" by Etienne Gu gnard. **Right**: Art by Rebecca Sugar



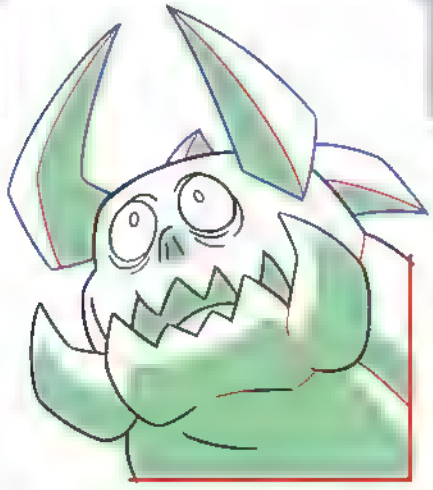
LIKE
CUSS
EMBEDDED
IN BODY



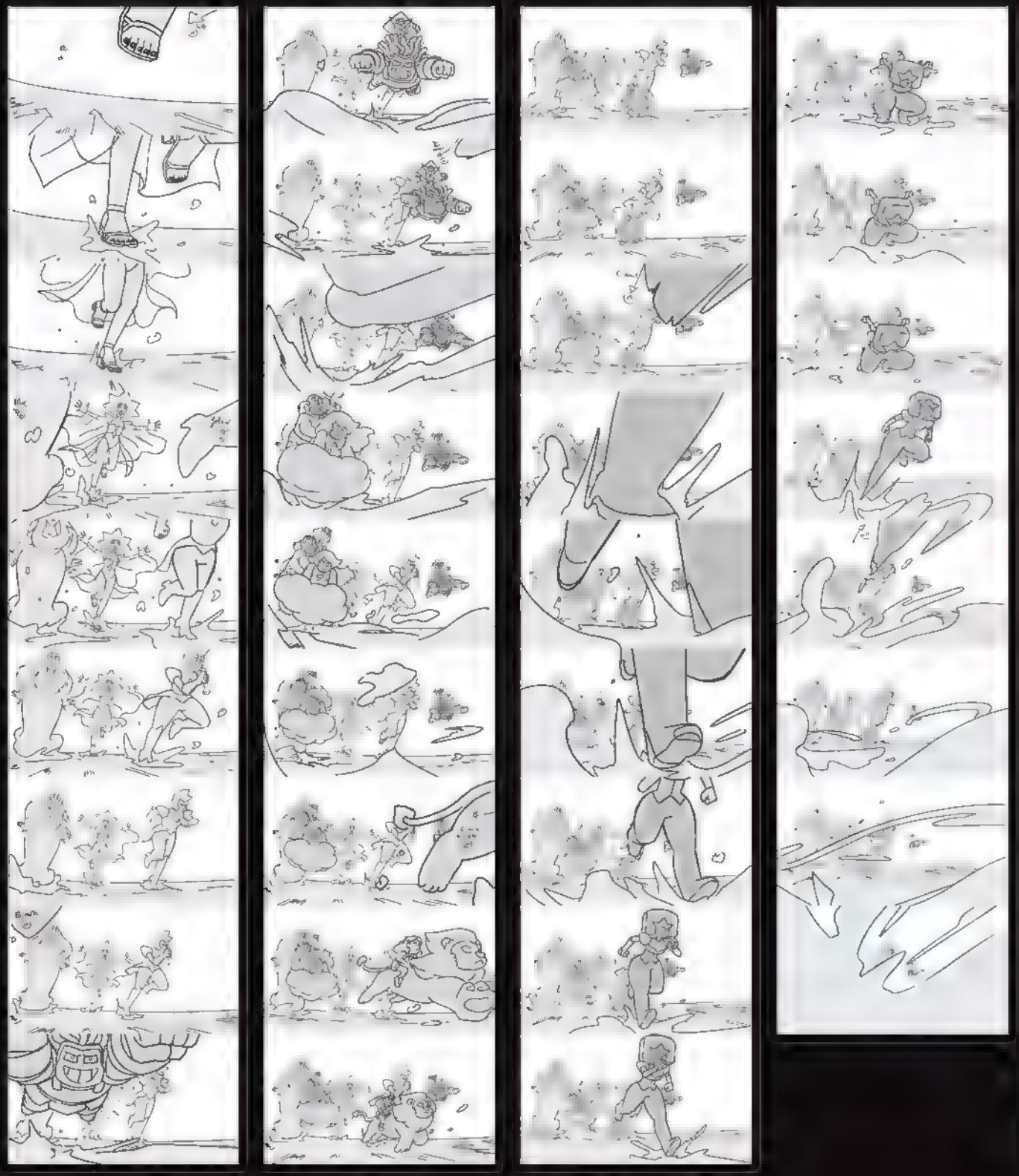
POETIQUE
CHEST
PLATE



TAIL??
FUN?



FINGER CLAW
TOE CLAW



Storyboard panels from "Ant Bully" by John A. Davis and Wes Dorman by Nicholas Gonzalez show the lengths to which storyboard artists will go to illustrate the exact movement they are planning for an action filled sequence. Here, key animation goes out

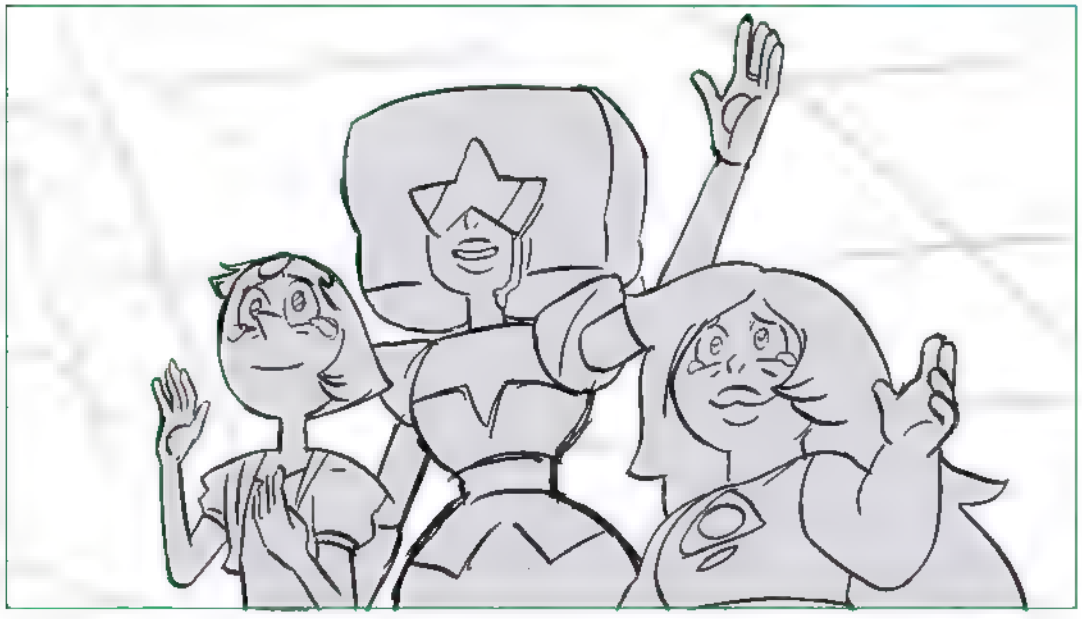
THE FUTURE

Page 181/350

Scene	Duration	Panel	Duration
2_I_1_G_1_E_2_B	08:00	7	01:00

Dialog
S: peridot.. .lapis ...bismuth ..i-

"Love Tub" storyboard panels by Steven Universe storyboard artist Miss Browster (left). Layout Artists (above) Alison Rodriguez Kotes (below) and Kelly Morris with Miss Browster (right) [illegible] Steve

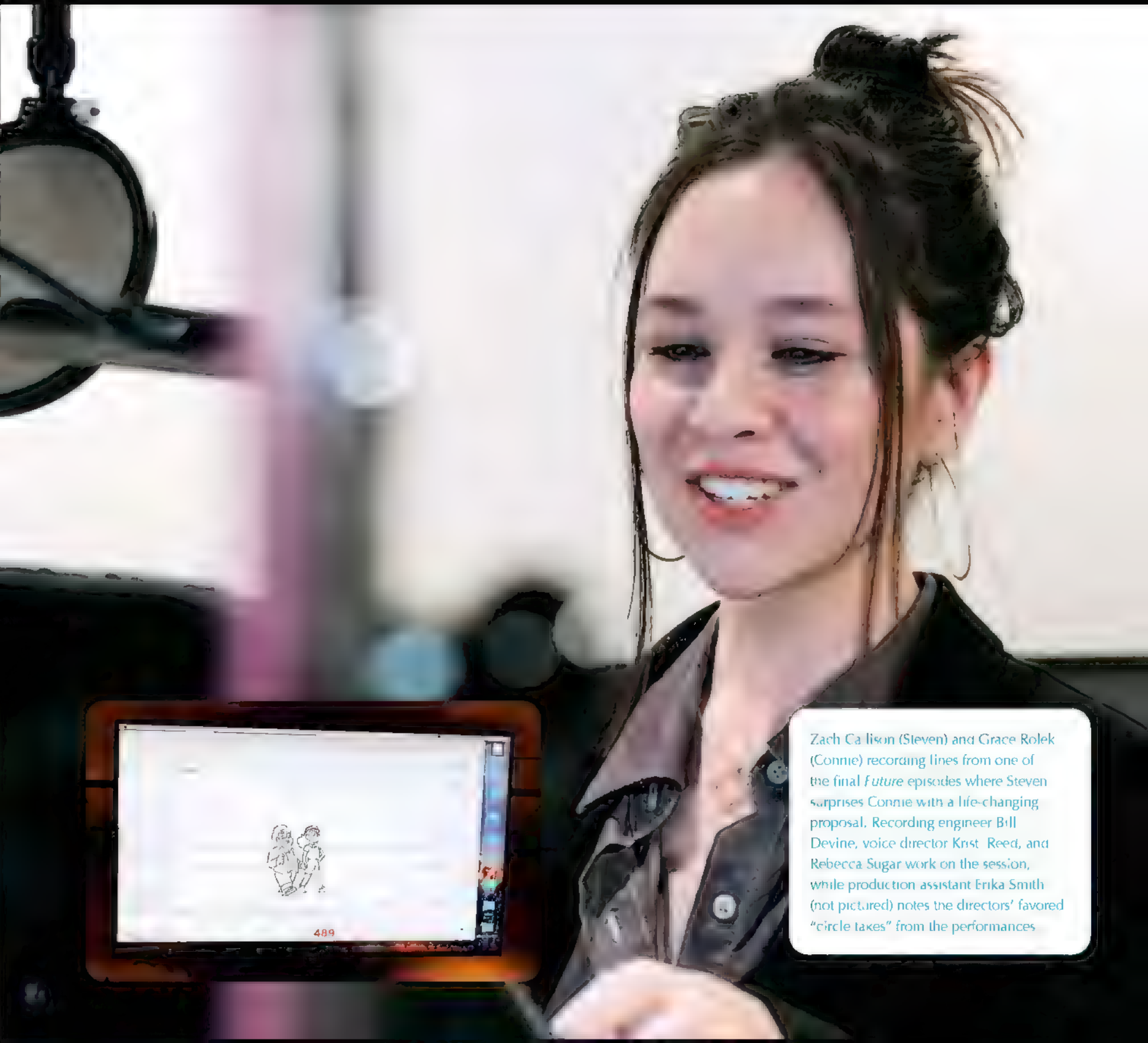


Background Layout from
"The Future"
Art by Steven Sugar
Background Painting by
Artwork Patrick Bryson
and Laura P

BIG
DONUT
EAT A
BIG
Donut

CRAB
SHACK

Recording



Zach Callison (Steven) and Grace Rolek (Connie) recording lines from one of the final *Future* episodes where Steven surprises Connie with a life-changing proposal. Recording engineer Bill Devine, voice director Kristi Reed, and Rebecca Sugar work on the session, while production assistant Erika Smith (not pictured) notes the directors' favored "circle takes" from the performances

Conference Room

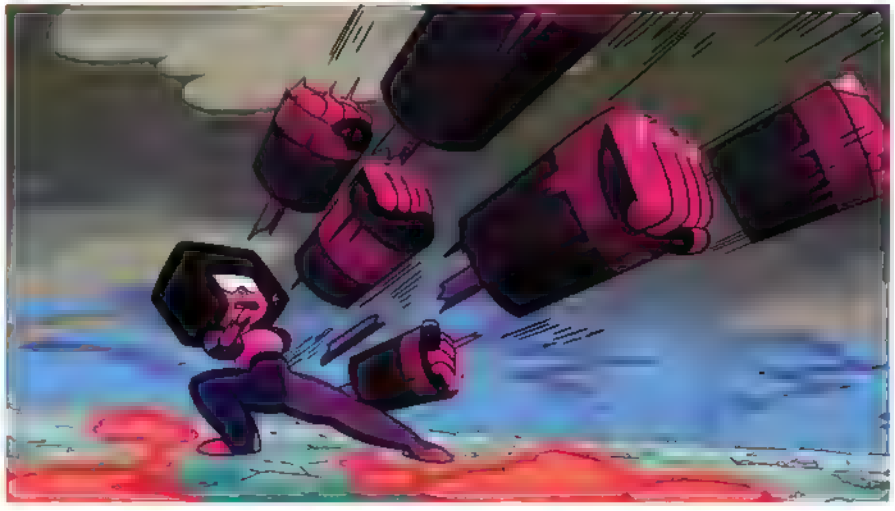
"Crossover Nexus"

n OK Ko! Le Cartoon Network show OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes, created by Ian Jones-Quartey and Peter Browngardt, episode "Crossover Nexus" which saw Steven Universe character Ruby team up with several cross-over characters, including Steven Universe's own character Ruby, designed as Steven Universe has similarly to K.O.'s setting as the Ruby Gem Kingdom. It aired in 2017.

Left Ruby Kaan Gem Squad Smith, painted by Emily Watts, based on a pencil drawing by Danny Hoster. **Below** Stills from the episode

n a cut sect on of "Crossover Nexus," Ruby and Sapphire fight each other and are stopped by K O.'s antics

This spread. Selected panels showing the main beats of the story (there are more panels between each of these) from the cut section. Storyboards by Dave Alegre. **Opposite right:** Stills from the episode.

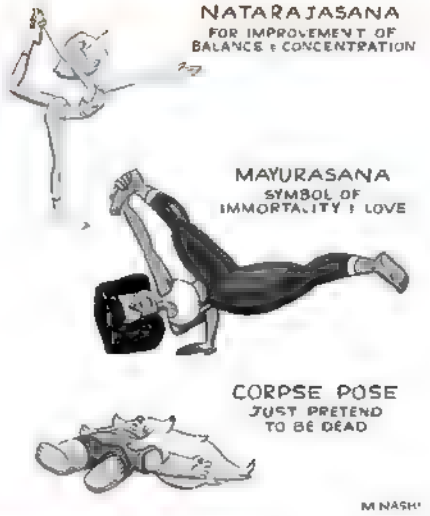


Crew Art

Art by Leonard Hung

Art by Jessica Pettavino

Art by Madeline Queripel



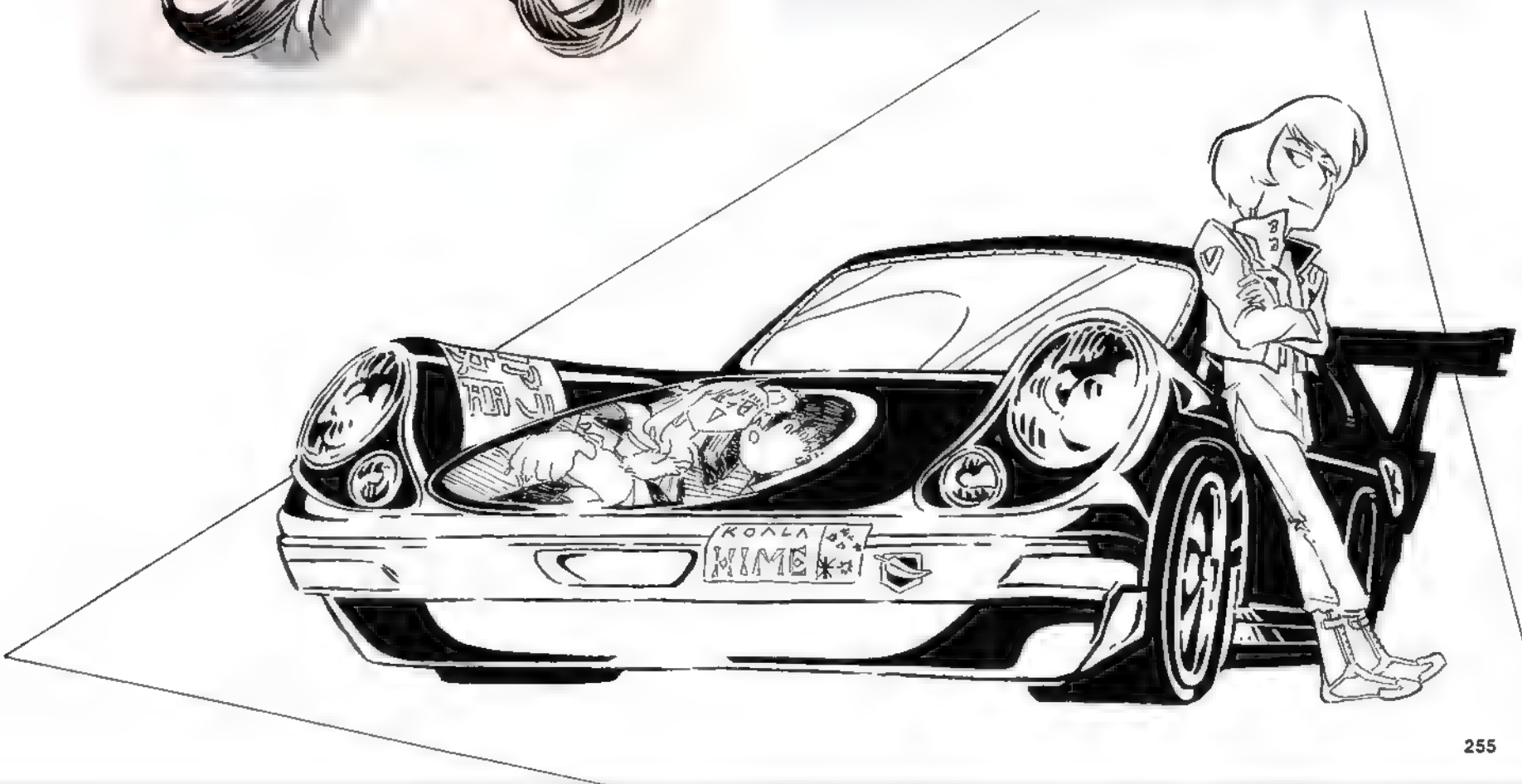
Art by Mary Nash

Art by Patrick Bryson.

Crew Art

Art by Hilary Florido

HF '18


KOALA
MIME

Crew Art

Above and opposite: Art by Alex Myung

Art by Joe Johnston.

Art by Rebecca Sugar.

Art by Kat Morris

Crew Art

Art by [illegible]

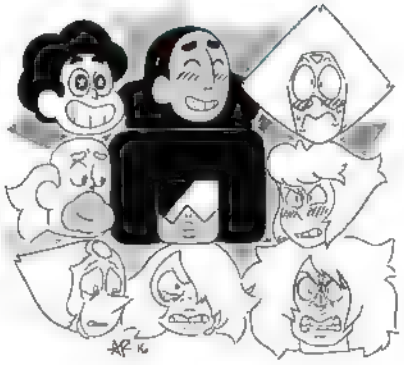
Art by Aleth Romanillos

Art by Ava [illegible]

Art by [illegible]

Art by Alan Pasman.

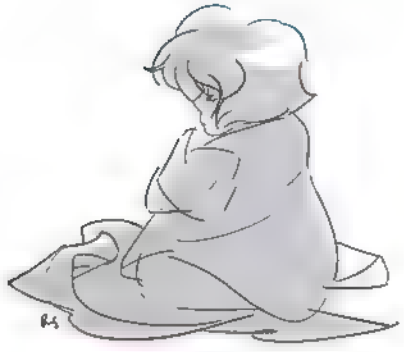
Art by Aleth Romanillos.



Art by Danny Cragg

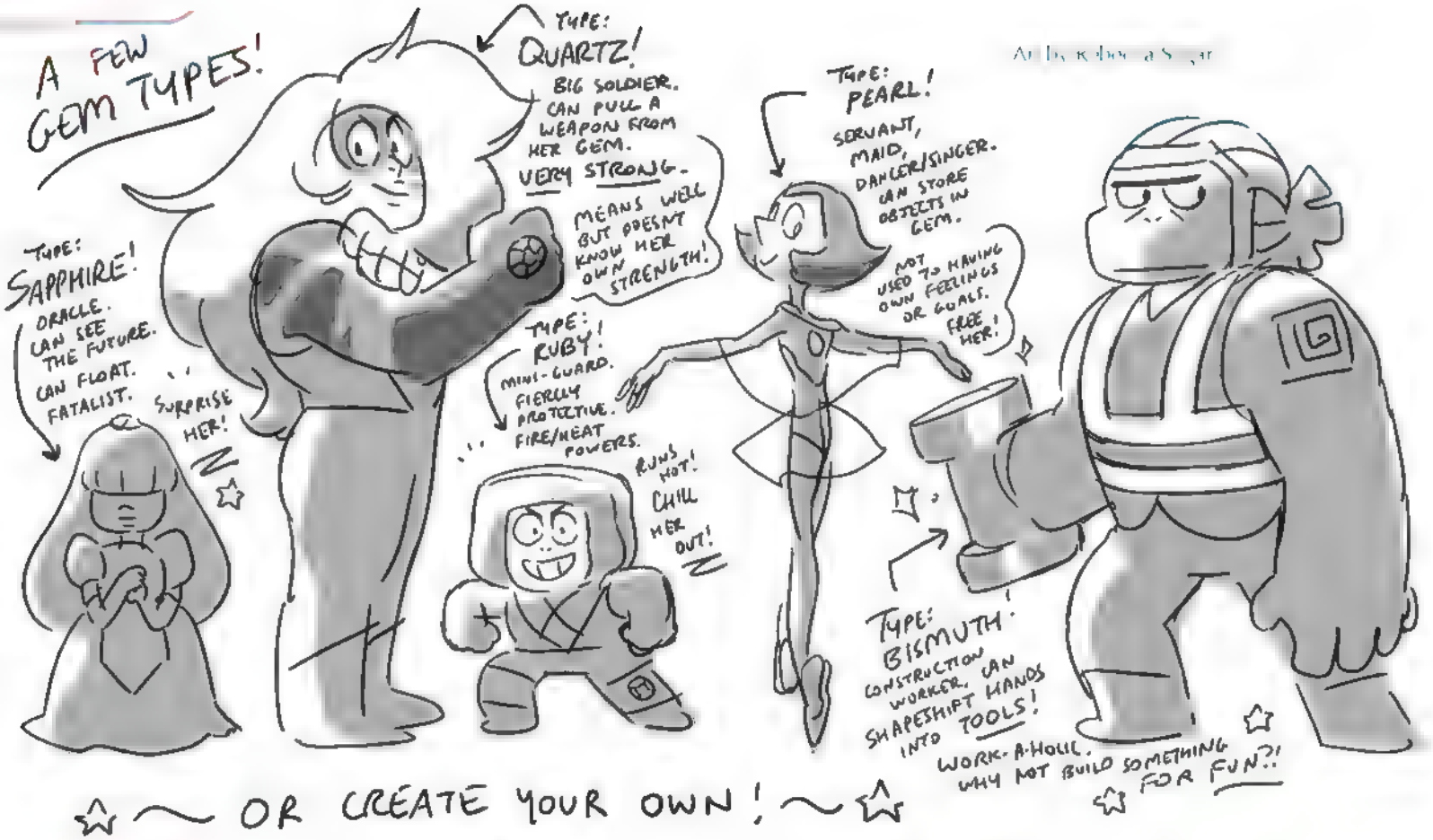
Art by [illegible]

Art by Kenny Cooper

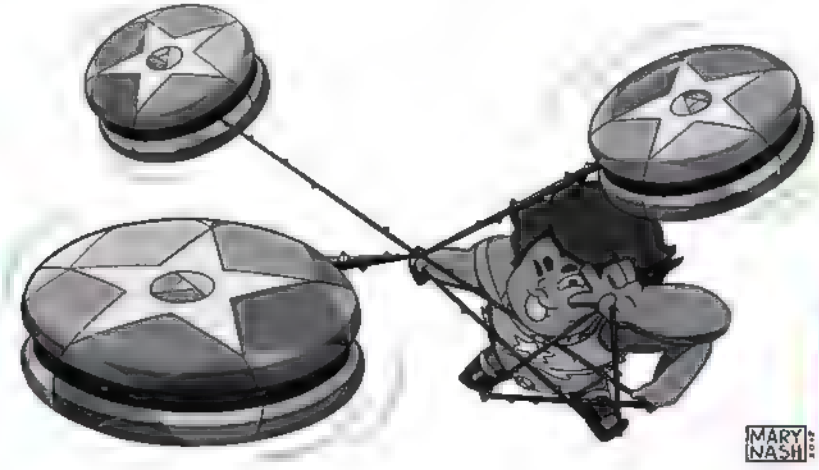


Art by Rebecca Sugar

Crew Art



Art by Rebecca Sugar.



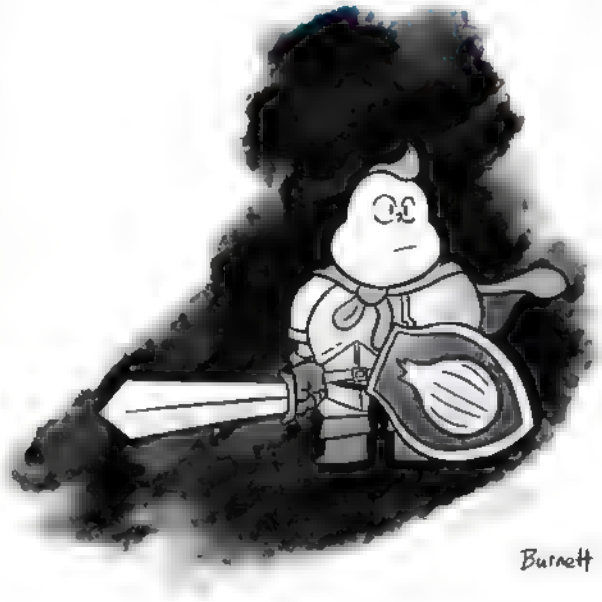
Art by Mary Nash.

Art by Rebecca Sugar.

Crew Art

Art by Christy Cohen

Art by Aleth Romanillos



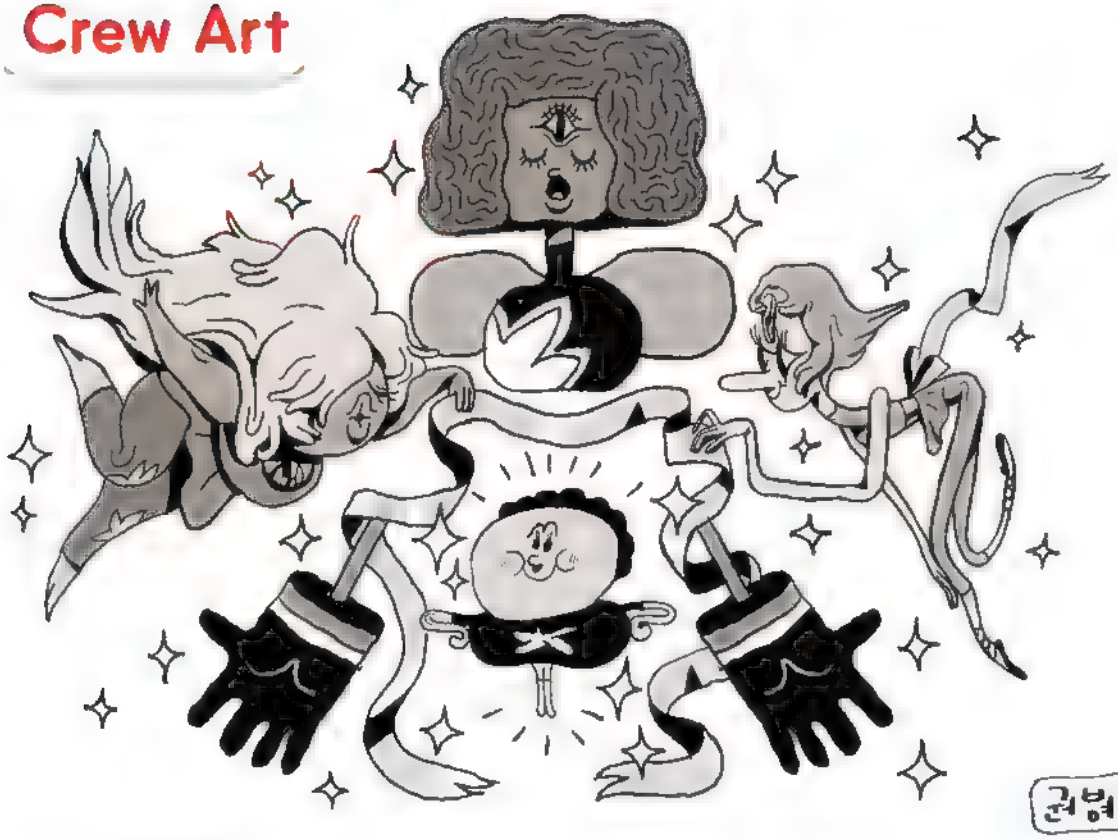
Art by Matt Burnett

Art by Matt Burnett

Art by Chris Howard

Art by Hilary Horn

Crew Art



Art by Michelle Kwon

Art by Jane Bak

Art by Rebecca Sugar

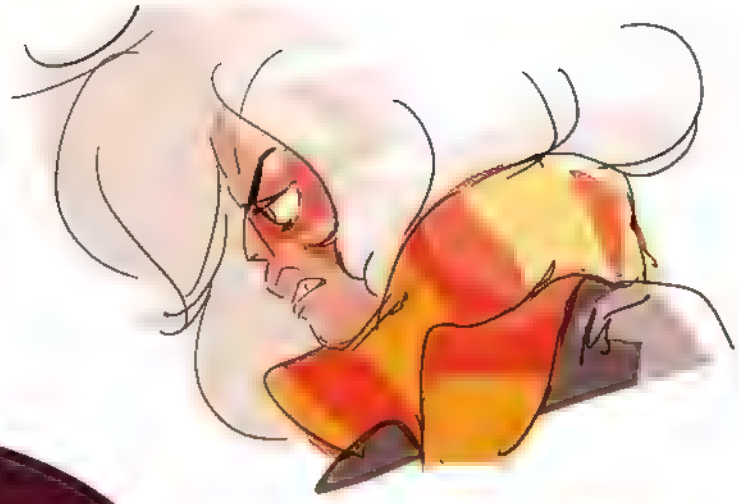
Above: Art by Kat Morris. **Opposite** Art by Maya Petersen.

STEVEN UNIVERSE FUTURE
SAT, DEC 7
CN
VOLLEYBALL
WRITTEN AND STORYBOARDED BY MAYA & ETIENNE

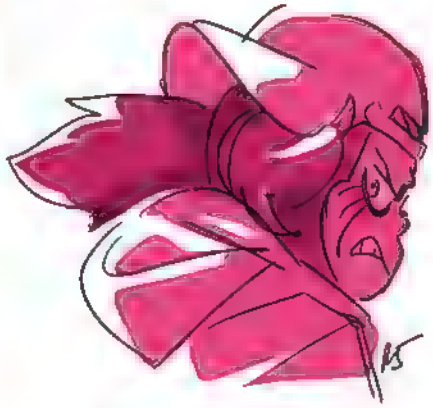
Crew Art

Crew Art

GOOD LUCK
TO YOU TOO
YOU LIKE ME



#MyIntersexBody
DOESN'T NEED FIXING!
InterACT



Opposite: Art by Rebecca Sugar. **This page:** The final piece Rebecca created while working on the series

Credits

Steven Universe Combined Credits
Seasons 4, 5, and *Future*

Executive Producer: Rebecca Sugar
Co-Executive Producers: Joe Johnston, Kat Morris, Alonso Ramirez Ramos
Producer: Jackie Buscarino
Art Directors: Liz Artinian, Patrick Bryson, Ricky Cometa, Jasmin Lai, Elle Michalka
Animation Directors: Ki-Yong Bae, Nick DeMayo, Choi Eunok, Sangun Jeon, Sue Hong Kim, Byung Ki Lee, Haesung Park, Jin Hee Park, Jinhui Park, Sangman Park, Seungwook Shin
Sheet Timing: Kimson Albert, Aaron Brewer, Joey Capps, Doug Gallery, Sarah Gencarelli, Takafumi Hori, Robert Ingram, Maureen Mlynarczyk
Supervising Directors: Joe Johnston, Kat Morris
Directed by Joe Johnston, Kat Morris, Alonso Ramirez Ramos
Story by Matt Burnett, Hilary Florido, Tom Herpich, Joe Johnston, Ian Jones-Quartey, Ben Levin, Kat Morris, Jack Pendarvis, Alonso Ramirez Ramos, Taneka Stotts, Rebecca Sugar, Kate Tsang
Written & Storyboarded by Lamar Abrams, Aaron Austin, Miki Brewster, Danny Cragg, Hilary Florido, Warren Fok, Drew Green, Etienne Guignard, Tom Herpich, Takafumi Hori, Colin Howard, Joe Johnston, Ian Jones-Quartey, Amish Kumar, Christine Liu, Jeff Liu, Katie Mitroff, Raven Molisee, Kat Morris, Adam Muto, Maya Petersen, Madeline Queripel, Rebecca Sugar, Paul Villeco, Pen Ward, Jesse Zuke
Story Editors: Matt Burnett, Ben Levin, Jack Pendarvis, Taneka Stotts, Kate Tsang
Production Manager: Lisa Zunich
Production Coordinators: Katie Barker, Christy Cohen, Cynthia Paredes, Alan Pasman
Production Assistants: Kevin Inciong, Raymond Schmidt, Erika Smith
Digital Production Assistants: Alan Pasman, Raymond Schmidt
Production Intern: Shelby Nicholas
Lead Character Design: Becky Dreistadt, Colin Howard, Danny Hynes, Aleth Romanillos
Character Design: Danny Cragg, Colin Howard, Aleth Romanillos
Additional Character Design: Edward Artinian, Lucyola Langi, Carly Monardo
Prop Design: Angie Wang
Additional Illustrations: Guy Davis
Lead Background Design: Julian DePerio, Steven Sugar
Background Design: Jane Bak, Leonard Hung, Alex Myung, Mary Nash, Emily Walus
Additional Background Design: Steven Sugar
Lead Background Paint: Patrick Bryson
Background Paint: Charles Hilton, Melissa King, Michelle Kwon, Jasmin Lai, Kat Tsai, Amanda Winsterstein
Additional Background Paint: Alison Abitbol, Caroline Choi, Ricky Cometa, David Merritt, Elle Michalka, Kevin Osorio, Laura Price, Hans Tseng, Eastwood Wong
Color Design: Efrain Farias, Ashley Fisher, Leigh Luna, Hans Tseng
Additional Color Design: Chris Marino
Animatic Editor: Lauren Hecht
Additional Animatic Timing: Jill Calhoun, Nicholas Veith
Storyboard Supervisor: Hilary Florido
Storyboard Revisions: Danny Cragg, Amish Kumar, Leiana Nitura, Maya Petersen, Nicole Rodriguez, Aleth Romanillos, Mira W.
Additional Storyboard Revisions: Miki Brewster, Joe Johnston, Erin Kim, Douglas Olsen, Paul Villeco
Featured Voices: Zach Callison, Michaela Dietz, Estelle, Deedee Magno Hall, Shelby Rabara
Additional Voices: Lamar Abrams, Uzo Aduba, Chris Jai Alex, Tahani Anderson, Dee Bradley Baker, Kimberly Brooks, Jemaine Clement, Eugene Cordero, Colton Dunn, Christine Ebersole, Susan Egan, Kate Flannery, Crispin Freeman, Larissa Gallagher, Brian George, Reagan Gomez-Preston, Lisa Hannigan, Johnny Hawkes, Marieve Herington, Miriam A. Hyman, Alastair James, Ian Jones-Quartey, Alexia Khadime, Patti LuPone, Erica Luttrell, Natasha Lyonne, Michelle Maryk, Mary Elizabeth McGlynn, AJ Michalka, Kate Micucci, Indya Moore, Matthew Moy, Jennifer Paz, Christine Pedi, Brian Posehn, Grace Rolek, Della Saba, Tom Scharpling, Shoniqua Shandai, Zachary Steel, Sarah Stiles, Cristina Vee, Dave Willis, Charlyne Yi
Voice Director: Kent Osborne, Kristi Reed
Casting Director: Kristi Reed
Recording Studio Manager: Susy Campos, Stacy Renfroe
Director Audio Production: Robert Serda
Recording Engineers: David W. Barr, Bill Devine, Robert Serda
Animation Checking: Julie Benenati, Sandy Benenati, Vicki Casper
Track Reading by Slightly Off Track
Supervising Editor: Paul Douglas
Picture Editor: Mattaniah Adams, Tom Browngardt, Rob Getzschman

Additional Picture Editing: Tom Browngardt, Paul Douglas, Bobby Gibis
After Effects Artist: Joel Espana, David Estes
Assistant Editor: Anna Granfors
Director Production Technology: Antonio Gonella
Overseas Production Facility: "Rough Draft Korea Co., Ltd.," "SMIP CO., LTD"
Additional Animation by James Baxter, Takafumi Hori
Additional Promotion Art: Chromosphere
Dialogue Editor: Alex Borquez, Eric Freeman
Supervising Sound Editors: "Timothy J. Borquez, M.P.S E .," Tony Orozco
Sound Editors: Alex Borquez, Patrick Janssen, Scott Manke, Daisuke Sawa, Tom Syslo
Re-Recording Mixers: "Timothy J. Borquez, C.A.S .," Tony Orozco
Post Production Supervisor: Tony Tedford
Post Production Manager: Alicia Parkinson
Post Production Assistant: Therisse Amunatigui
Production Estimator: Cecilia Rheins
Production Administration: Linda Barry
Music Composers: aivi & surasshu, Jeff Ball
Music Mixing Engineer: James Roach
Musicians

Winds: Kristin Naigus
Drums: Roger "Rekcahdam" Hicks
Harp: Joanne Moo
Guitars: Stemage, Edwin Rhodes
Piano, Synths: aivi & surasshu
Strings. Jeff Ball, Michaela Nachtgall
Winds: Kristin Naigus
Horn: Marc Papeghin
Bass: Travis Kindred
Saxophone: Tim Teylan

Saxophone Recording Engineer: Julian Sanchez
Additional Music: aivi & surasshu, Jeff Ball, Hellen Jo, Jake Kaufman, Emily King, Mike Krol, Amish Kumar, Ben Levin, Jeff Liu, Jack Pendarvis, Stemage, Rebecca Sugar
Additional Lyrics: Miki Brewster, Matt Burnett, Hellen Jo, Emily King, Amish Kumar, Ben Levin, Jeff Liu, Jack Pendarvis, Rebecca Sugar
Current Series Executives: Conrad Montgomery, Nicole Rivera
Executive Producers: Brian A. Miller, Jennifer Pelphrey, Rob Sorcher, Tramm Wigzell

Stamp line art
by Rebecca Sugar

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the *Steven* crew, production team, and cast—present and past—for all of the fun and empathy that has been shared because of your work, and for your contributions to this book. A fusion of gratitude and awe goes out to Rebecca Sugar and Ian Jones-Quartey for their deep involvement in this project and for their inspiring cartoon achievements, and further thanks are extended to everyone at Cartoon Network Studios and WB/CN Publishing, including Kat Morris, Alonso Ramirez Ramos, Steven Sugar, Anna Lee, Lisa Zunich, Jackie Buscarino, Erika Smith, Janet No, Marisa Marionakis, Jason Struss, Victoria Selover, and Josh Anderson Thank you to steadfast editor Eric Klopfer, and to the whole team at Abrams, including Annalea Manalili, Denise LaCongo, and Larry Pekarek. Thank you to my very animated students and colleagues at University of the Arts for their curiosity and exploration. Last, loving thanks go out to local Earth-gems Jobina, Quinton, and Felix

Chris McDonnell, Philadelphia, April 2020

Editor: Eric Klopfer
Designer: Chris McDonnell
Production Manager: Larry Pekarek
Cover art by Jasmin Lai
Cover design by Chris McDonnell and Rebecca Sugar

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019939754

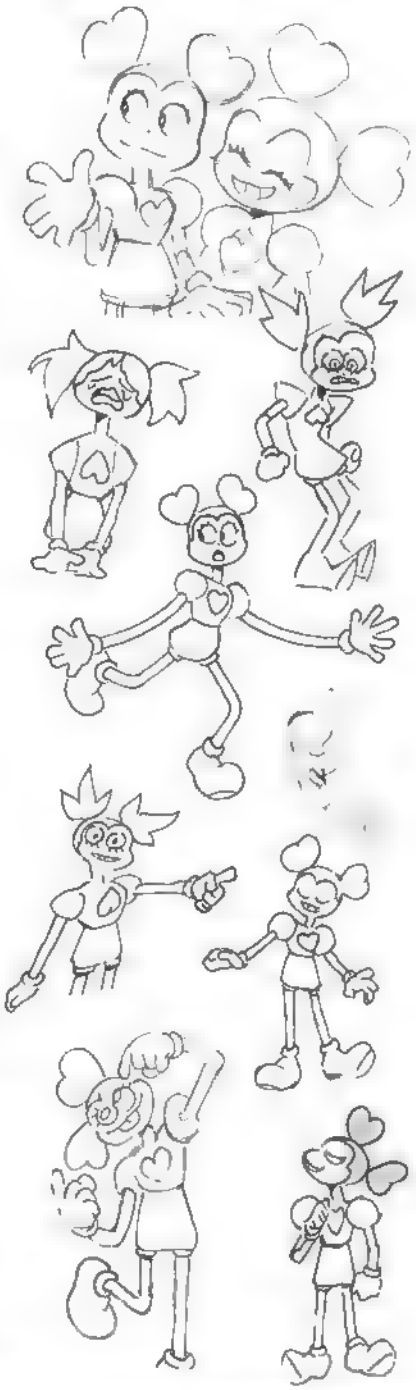
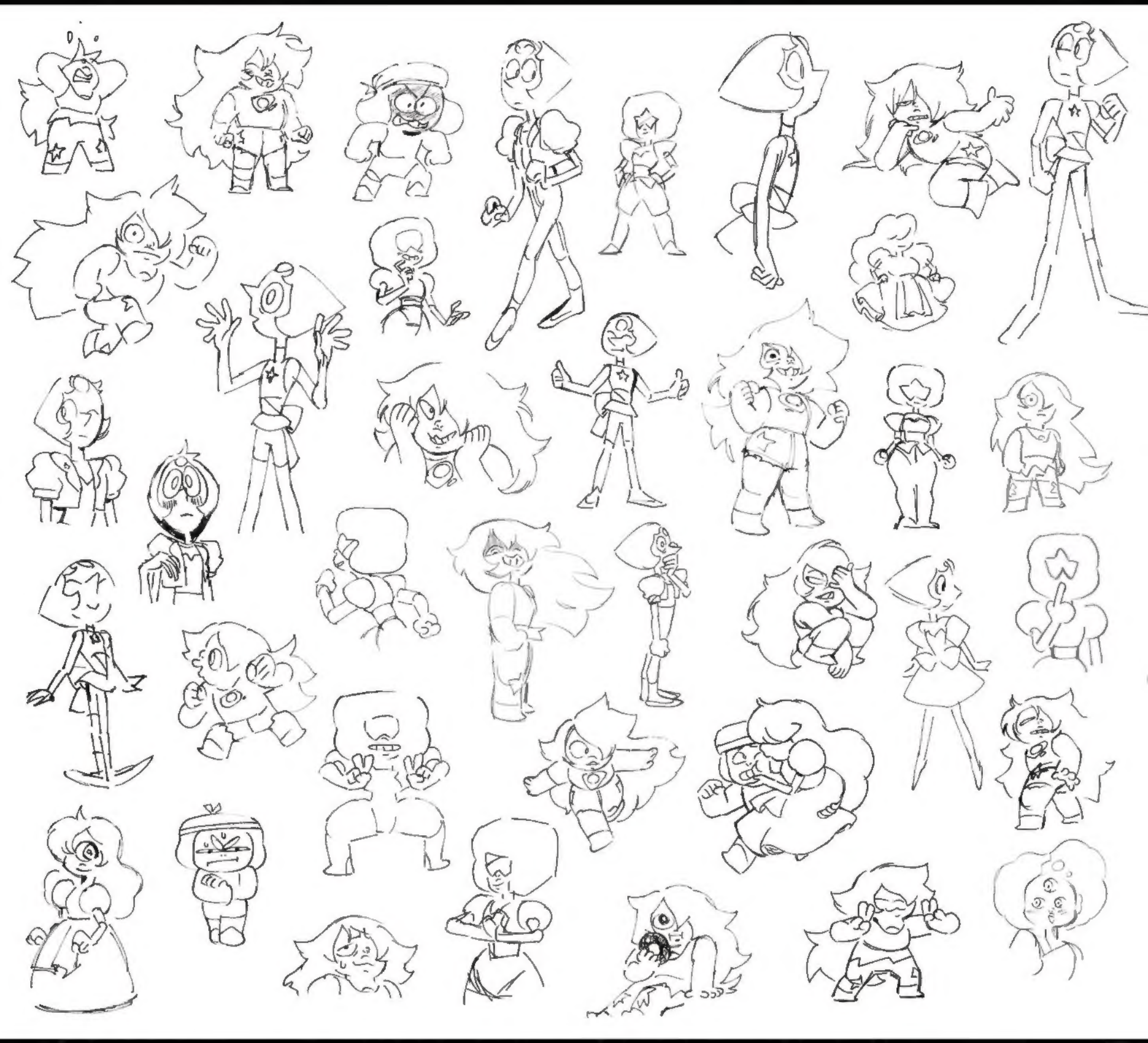
ISBN: 978-1-4197-4284-2
eISBN: 978 1 68335 872 5

STEVEN UNIVERSE, OK K.O.! LET'S BE HEROES & BEN 10 ™ & © 2020 Cartoon Network. A WarnerMedia Company. All rights reserved © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. *TEEN TITANS* and all related characters and elements are ™ and © DC Comics

Published in 2020 by Abrams, an imprint of ABRAMS. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher

Abrams books are available at special discounts when purchased in quantity for premiums and promotions as well as fundraising or educational use. Special editions can also be created to specification. For details, contact specialsales@abramsbooks.com or the address below

Abrams® is a registered trademark of Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

ABRAMS The Art of Books
195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007
abramsbooks.com

Endpapers by Kat Morris